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The Abandoned Farmer

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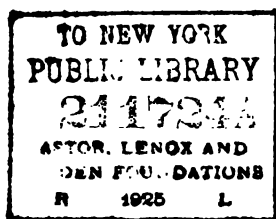
The Abandoned Farmer

By Sydney H. Preston



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M. S. M.



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The Abandoned Farmer

I

BEFORE THE PLUNGE

“**Y**OU need to turn the little chap loose in the country,” was the doctor’s verdict, given in a low tone that didn’t—thank Heaven!—attract Paul’s attention, though if the child hadn’t been absorbed for the moment in driving a brood of imaginary chickens into an imaginary coop under a real parlor table this indiscreet reference would have caused a scene. The doctor had been cautioned not to do or say anything that would arouse suspicion in the mind of our offspring as to the real nature of his visit, so he should have known better, but of course he couldn’t know what a dread Paul had of sometime having to go somewhere without his parents.

Marion sank weakly into a chair, then sat

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up very straight and braced herself for what was coming; I made a frantic pantomimic appeal to the doctor for temporary silence, then I grabbed Paul by the arm, pointing out the fiction that the chickens had escaped around the end of the table into the hall. When he had darted out in pursuit I shut the door, turning in time to hear Marion say with a piteous break in her voice: "Doctor, tell us the worst—is it his lungs?"

His tone, to our over-anxious ears, had suggested a fear that he was about to break the news that our precious boy was doomed to an early grave, and it was a relief to see him not only smile, but look as if he would enjoy a hearty laugh. "Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Carton," he said cheerily. "He's a delicate little fellow, but spry as a cricket and quite sound. Send him to the country for six months,—and—ha ha!—don't coddle him so much."

Send our little Paul to the country! Even in her half-allayed anxiety Marion smiled at the idea. Paul, who had never been away from her tender care for one hour, who had howled with dismay when he gathered from

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our unguarded conversation that when little boys went to school they didn't take their parents too! Now Paul, up to this time, fortunately for our peace of mind, had been spared the ordinary illnesses and accidents of childhood; indeed, so carefully had he been guarded, that at the age of six he had never tasted unboiled water, unsterilized milk or unhygienic bread, and although he had learned to walk upstairs by himself, had never descended alone except when an anxious parent stood breathlessly at the foot of the stairs ready to break a possible fall. An ordinary child might have rebelled or evaded our watchfulness, but Paul was not an ordinary child, and he was preternaturally anxious to avoid danger and keep us up to the mark. His active little mind ferreted out supposititious disasters with alarming realism until our nerves were unstrung by the constant effort to guard against the possible calamities that he suggested.

Send *Paul* to the country? *Send* him—to the *country*! A likely thing, indeed!—and leave us to be tortured by mental visions of his dear little incapable feet projecting

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out of a water barrel or being mowed off by an overgrown lawn-mower, his helpless form impaled upon the horns of a bull or dangling from the mouth of a vicious horse.

That evening, after Paul was safely asleep, we talked the whole matter over. We had previously toyed with nebulous schemes of living in the country, but the doctor's opinion transformed what had seemed an impracticable but entrancingly delightful castle-in-the-air to a definite consideration of how we could make it an actuality. As Marion said, it was our plain duty to do what was best for Paul, even if we had to sacrifice a few extraneous luxuries in carrying it out, and when she used the word duty I knew that, come what would, we were going to live in the country. Duty is Marion's strong point; mine also, in a sort of second-hand way, for I have learned to obey the dictates of her conscience with an amazing alacrity. With her, the principle involved in the most trivial act is a matter of vital importance, while I am inclined to act first, and from that action deduce a principle to justify the course I have taken. Her mind is in-

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tensely analytical, and she believes rigidly what she ought to believe; I am, perhaps, a trifle more imaginative, more easily swayed by passing enthusiasms, more given to believing what I want to believe, less inclined to see a clear-cut difference between black and white.

It is not strange, therefore, that our opinions often differ, but in this case we were of one mind from the first, the only difficulty that faced us being the question of ways and means, and on this point Marion was, strange to say, more optimistic than I.

"I have a feeling, a presentiment," she said, in a tone of fervent conviction, "that if we make up our minds hard enough it will become possible. We've been talking about this for years, and I never felt until this moment that it was really going to be true."

For a moment her calm certainty influenced my hopes, then I shook my head doubtfully. "You forget," I rejoined, "that there's no other opening in sight, and as long as I'm doing 'Music and Drama' for the *Observer* I must stay in the city. If I had regular hours, if I were a bank clerk,

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for instance, we might live in the suburbs, but——”

“ We’ve been over all that hundreds of times,” she interrupted, “ and you know that if you had been a bank clerk I wouldn’t have married you. You’re not going to give up journalism, but I’m sure something will happen to let us live where we want to live. And as for the suburbs, it seems to me it would be better to get a real farm in the real country. If we could find a good comfortable farm-house near the railroad with plenty of land around it, I don’t believe it would cost us any more than one of those flimsy cottages with a garden plot attached that we looked at last year.”

I found, as we talked the matter over, that Marion’s imagination had been fired by the idea of some quaint old-fashioned homestead with gabled roof, open fireplaces and latticed windows, surrounded by ancient shade-trees and a straggling apple-orchard. All these accessories I could appreciate, and, in comparison, an ordinary suburban cottage, one of many others exactly alike, began to seem quite out of the question. There were de-

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lightful possibilities about buying a real farm, not to mention the inviting prospect of running it afterward.

"That's a capital idea!" I exclaimed, in eager approval. "I could raise a couple of hundred dollars to make the first payment, then we could give a mortgage for the balance and pay it off with the proceeds of the first year's crop. Then we could soon make enough money to——"

I stopped short, for I became aware that my wife was regarding me with a smile of loving toleration. "There you are again, Henry," she said, with a merry laugh. "What a lot of money we'd save if I let you carry out a few of your wild schemes! We're not going to raise one dollar to make a first payment; we're not going to give a mortgage, so you'll not be able to pay it off with the first year's crop."

"But it was your proposal," I protested, "you said——"

"I didn't say we might *buy* a farm, but I think we might be able to rent one for less than we pay for this house, and I'm sure we can live more cheaply in the country than

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in the city, if we make up our minds not to spend money needlessly."

It didn't seem to me that a rented farm without a mortgage could be as attractive as the one I had imagined, but I reluctantly admitted that Marion's plan might be more economical than mine. If I hadn't done so she certainly would have reminded me of some of my errors of judgment.

"And now," she continued, "the next thing to consider is how much money we can afford not to spend on the farm."

At that moment I had mentally unloaded a car of farm implements, resplendent in green and red paint, with the same feeling of delightful excitement that accompanies the unpacking of a Noah's ark. In fact, I had them arranged on the station platform and was directing my hired men how to load the wagons. "Can afford not to spend," I repeated abstractedly.

There was silence. When I awoke from my reverie I discovered that my wife was gazing at me with a curious expression, her lips tightly compressed. I stood to attention at once.

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"Yes, Marion," I went on briskly. "I was just thinking about that. I was just calculating how many implements we could buy."

"Indeed? And have you decided whether you would rather go in for horse-raising or thoroughbred cattle?"

"No, I haven't got that far; but I think a herd of Jerseys would do to start with, then——"

"Then you *are* like other men! I wonder if any city man ever farmed without losing his common-sense. Can't you see, Henry, that we'd be hopelessly in debt if we started in that way? Why, even if we were wealthy the money would soon be all gone at that rate of spending. How many otherwise level-headed men do you know who have squandered fortunes in farming for pleasure?"

"Well, there's Judge Davis, and old Hamilton, and—oh, lots of them—but, you see, they didn't know how to manage, and I would profit by their mistakes. I wouldn't borrow five hundred dollars, for instance, to invest in Jerseys, without seeing my way

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clear to double the money in a year or two by selling gilt-edged butter."

"Now listen, Henry," said my wife, with the indulgent yet unrelenting smile of a mother who pushes a fragile vase beyond the reach of her infant's grasp; "you're not going to borrow *one* dollar; you're not going to have a herd of Jerseys; you're not going to buy reapers and threshing machines, horses and wagons and windmills. How much would a spade, a rake, and a hoe cost?"

I gasped. "A *spade*—a *rake*!—" I began incredulously, then I smiled a smile of feeble intelligence to conceal the fact that I failed to see the point: I know what it feels like to perpetrate a pointless joke.

"And a hoe," continued Marion, earnestly. "How much would they cost?"

"About two dollars," I replied, in vague wonderment.

"Then that settles it! You may spend two dollars in implements, but not another cent. And as for drains——"

"Perhaps you would allow three for them," I interjected, with a derisive laugh.

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"Judge Davis spent *three thousand* in underdraining his farm."

"Then we'll do without underdrains. Do you begin to see now what I mean by deciding how much money we can afford not to spend."

"I believe I do," I answered, amused yet fascinated by her idea. "It will total a large amount if you keep on, but I don't see how a farm can be made to pay without investing money in it. Why, you've got to put money into anything, even into a gold mine, before you can get returns."

It was an unfortunate illustration, as I learned from Marion's pitying look. I winced; I knew what was coming. "Henry," she said, and in her face I saw that she was responding to the call of duty, "I don't grudge one dollar of that money you put into the Emperor shares last year, even if the lesson is wasted on you, as it seems to be; for that experience made me determine that I would never trust your judgment about investments again when my common-sense tells me you are wrong. Aunt Sophy says that all men who haven't

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been brought up on a farm are attacked by an insane belief, at some period of their lives, that they can make money by farming. She says Uncle Philip had made a hundred thousand dollars in the grocery business when he retired and bought a farm. She implored him not to do it, but he persisted, saying there was heaps of money in farming if properly managed, and he could run a farm on business principles and make it pay. But when he died she found he had left only forty thousand dollars for her to live on, and she is convinced that if he hadn't been taken away so suddenly she would have been altogether penniless. Poor Aunt Sophy! She weeps more over that money than over Uncle Philip, and the worst of it is that some semi-religious novel she has read has unsettled her old-fashioned ideas about heaven so that she is afraid that when her turn comes she'll find him at it again. The thought has hardened her so that I shouldn't be surprised if she married old Mr. Fairman and renounced Uncle Philip."

I had been about to say that I felt my-

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self to be peculiarly fitted to illustrate paying methods of farming, but I desisted. I had been inclined to resent Marion's taunt about the unlucky mining venture, but the serious recital of the woes of her uncle and aunt moved me to laughter. I jocularly declared I would go around to the bank to see if the money we had saved by not buying a farm had been placed to my credit, but her anxiety that I should understand her theory checked my innocent levity.

"You wouldn't make light of this matter," she said, reproachfully, "if you understood its importance. Now listen: what I mean is, that instead of calculating how much money we might be able to spend on the farm we should try to see how much we can do without spending. I am sure that is the right way to avoid making a farm not pay. For example, if you think you want to buy an electric potato-digger you ought to save up the money and then——"

"And then you'll decide that I can afford not to buy it!"

"Probably—but don't you see the money would then be clear profit, and you

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would have it instead of a useless machine."

"It wouldn't be useless—it would dig potatoes."

"It *might* dig potatoes, but Aunt Sophy says you can't depend on any of these contrivances, so the chances are that it *would* be useless; besides, you said the Emperor shares would dig gold, and they swallowed——"

The thought of mining shares is distasteful to me; to have them dragged into the conversation is distracting; to look forward to having every budding plan nipped by the chilling reminders of bygone mistakes that my temperament would allow me to forget was not to be endured. "Marion," I interrupted, hastily, "it's a capital plan! I'll agree to try it if we ever have a farm, if you'll promise never to do or say anything to remind me of that stroke of bad luck."

"Don't you mean bad management?" she asked, gayly. "You have a dreadfully lax memory about these things, and I know you would have forgotten the Emperor shares long ago if I hadn't reminded you."

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However, you know it's for your own good and——"

"It isn't," I protested, with vehemence. "It dulls my sensibilities and hardens my heart."

Marion shook her head dubiously, but she promised.

I do not believe in my own presentiments, for I never have any, unless the ever-present optimistic belief that everything I undertake is going to turn out well is a presentiment, but I have learned by experience to place a certain amount of dependence upon Marion's. Therefore, for a few days after our conversation I confidently expected something to turn up, and every day when I returned home from the office I saw by her inquiring expectant glance that she was looking for the fulfilment of her prediction. As time passed, however, I began to think she had been mistaken, though I did not say so, for I know how annoying it is to have one's mistakes pointed out when one is most keenly conscious of them. Besides, to refrain made me feel magnanimous, and that feeling, perhaps, caused a shade of pitying

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magnanimity to creep into my tone when we discussed the project ; so Marion, who is intensely susceptible to inflections, was perfectly well aware that I was practising one of the higher virtues, as well as showing a delicate consideration for her feelings that she might well copy in regard to mine. Of course, we could do nothing but make plans during the winter ; but as spring approached, without any prospect of a change that would give me regular hours of work, it seemed as if we should have to give up, for a time, the prospect of moving to the country.

It was one morning early in March that the unexpected did happen. I was at my desk reading a batch of indignant letters taking me to task for an opinion I had expressed in an article on musical culture when a summons arrived from the editor-in-chief. Up to that moment I had been amused by the denials of my assertion that the performance of a Bach fugue on the piano as part of a concert programme should be condemned as provocative of snobbish pretence ; that the giving out of

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the theme by the performer had become the signal for the audience to assume an air of intense and exalted intellectual enjoyment, though not one person in a hundred could appreciate the logical development of such a composition or distinguish anything but a confused intermingling of the parts ; but the summons from the editor made me regard the matter more seriously. I hurriedly looked over the article to see if I had laid myself open to reproof for indiscretion. Yes, I had ! At the very end the statement glared at me that musicians listened to a fugue with the strained intentness of jugglers watching a fellow-performer keeping three balls in the air ; I had committed the fatal oversight of not saying *some* musicians. Probably an irate deputation representing the profession so notoriously sensitive to truthful criticism had waited upon the editor to demand a public retraction of the libel.

“ Sit down, Carton,” said the editor, as I entered. “ You’ve been doing ‘ Music and Drama ’ for two years now,” he said musingly, laying down his pen, “ and I don’t

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think I have expressed my opinion of your work to you personally."

I shook my head mutely, afraid of what was coming next.

"That, however, doesn't indicate any want of appreciation on my part. You have changed the former commonplace rut of criticism to something that people read with interest, and if they laugh and swear alternately, so much the better. You have a knack of telling the truth with a light touch that is quite refreshing. How would you like to edit the agricultural page in the weekly?"

I gazed at him in bewilderment; ready to laugh if he meant to be jocular, incredulous of his serious intention. "The agricultural page!" I exclaimed.

"Rather sudden, eh? Well, I'll tell you how the matter stands. Old Rollings is out of it, and I've got to fill his place at once. Now it strikes me that farmers don't hanker after instruction in their newspaper—they want to be entertained, and I think you might make the thing go. The salary will be higher and you can take your own time for the work."

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"But I don't know much about agriculture," I protested.

"That isn't of any consequence. There are the exchanges, the Farmer's Cyclopædia and the scissors, and you'll learn not to waste space by advising farmers to plant corn in hills three feet apart or to feed potato bugs on paris green. The main thing is to make the department entertaining, so let yourself go and be as funny as you like, provided there's a grain of horse-sense at the bottom. For instance, you might have an article on how to make the farm pay, taking as a text—um, let me see—ah—you might advocate——"

"The planting of summer boarders in rows three feet apart?" I ventured.

The editor leaned back in his chair and laughed. "Go ahead, Carton," he said warmly. "You mightn't be able to draw a better looking pig in a prize competition than the rest of us, but I'd bank on you making a pretty turn to his tail."

The die was cast, and yet, for a few days at least, I felt as one might, who, accustomed

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to prate of the certain bliss of a heavenly home, is suddenly presented with a pass to the delectable land. A kaleidoscopic vision dazzled me of a picturesque country house, an orchard, a cow, a horse, real hens for Paul, our own fruit and vegetables, but beyond I could not see clearly, for I was unnerved by the sudden transition from the fine arts to agriculture. I had gained a superficial insight into rural life from the stand-point of the summer boarder, but I was well aware that I didn't know as much about farming as about art and literature. However, the editor's confidence in my ability to do the work and Marion's glowing enthusiasm caused me to keep my misgivings to myself. Indeed, though I never boast, I find it difficult to detract from another person's estimate of my knowledge or attainments; it seems less egotistical to smile and look modest than to enlarge upon one's own affairs. There was just one thing that caused me a pang. Marion, in pointing out the advantage it would be to me to have a free hand in writing, casually acknowledged that for a long time she had felt that

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criticism was not my forte and that I would write better when I had more scope for my imagination. My pained surprise at this confession moved her to merriment, and she laughingly declared that a woman's vanity was all on the surface, but a man's was unfathomable. Did I answer back? No, I didn't, for when I am truly grieved I merely smile faintly with patient, loving forgiveness; besides, I didn't know what to say. Afterward—for I didn't realize it at the time—I saw that I felt hurt, not because she had underrated my previous work, but because she had heretofore simulated a proper appreciation of it. I cannot bear to think that my wife is capable of stooping to any kind of pretence, and I am quite single-minded in this, for I like her to be more perfect—infinately more perfect—than I am. One would suppose this statement to be unquestionable. It isn't; she immediately asks *why*, and in the silence which follows when I am trying to think she repeats the query with such challenging meaningful emphasis that, alas!—I cannot say.

II

PETER WAYDEAN IS FOUND WANTING

“**N**O,” said the postmistress, shaking her head dubiously, “I don’t think you’d find a place to suit within a mile of this station. You say you want a small farm with a middling good house, and the only vacant place about here has a hundred acres and the house ain’t no better than a shanty.”

It was the prettiest bit of country that we had yet found in our search for our ideal farm, and the answer of the postmistress caused us keen disappointment. Paul’s little hand, which had clutched mine with a tense expectant grip, suddenly relaxed. “Are we not going to live in the country?” he asked, in a trembling voice.

“Oh, I forgot the Waydean homestead,” the postmistress called out, as we turned away; “but anyway I don’t suppose”—she

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looked at us in turn with a speculative air, smiling slightly—"you could strike a bargain with old Peter."

"Why not?" demanded Marion eagerly. "Is it a nice place—is it near the railroad?"

"It's right next the turn of this road, about half a mile south. No one has lived there for twenty years, but he keeps the house in repair, and I guess it's cleaner than most houses that's lived in; but old Peter——" she stopped speaking, went to the door and looked apprehensively up and down the road. "Now I'll just tell you the plain truth," she continued confidentially. "I know it looks uncharitable to talk to strangers about your neighbors, but everyone round here knows what old Peter is, and if you're going to have any dealings with him you'll need to keep your eyes wide open. He's a crank and a screw, and some wouldn't know they was getting skinned till he'd got the job done. And such a man for law! It don't seem to matter much whether he wins or loses, he can't seem to get along without a suit going on. Now if he happened within earshot at this present minute

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he'd have the law of me and he'd summons you for witnesses."

"Thank you for the warning," I interjected, as she paused for breath. "What is the house like?"

"It's one of them old-fashioned kind, with tiny panes in the windows set cornery, and——"

"Not *diamond* panes, surely?" cried Marion, with a gasp of excitement.

The postmistress gazed at her with an expression of incredulous pity. "Oh, no," she replied; "just common glass, and I think you'd find it trying to have to look out of a different pane with both eyes. Then them big fireplaces would make it hard to heat, but you could board them up and put a base-burner in the hall and run the stove-pipe——"

"Oh, no!" ejaculated Marion, in horror. "That would be dreadful! Are they real big fireplaces, with andirons?"

"They're big enough in all conscience, but I don't mind seeing any hand-irons. There's some rubbishy old brass firedogs and fixings."

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Marion's eyes sparkled with joyful assurance and she stood up with an eager movement; I motioned her to wait.

"Do you happen to know," I asked the postmistress, "what is the rent of the place?"

"Well, he asks different rents from different people," she answered slowly, her features showing grim amusement, "and no one has ever managed to strike a bargain with him yet. Last spring a man came along from the city thinking as the place was standing idle anyway he ought to be able to rent it cheap for the summer, so he hunted Peter up to show him round. He was one of them big blustering sort of men that acts as if country people wasn't no better than door mats, but Peter followed him about as meek as Moses, carrying his overcoat and umbrella for him. They come in here about train time, then the man pulls out a dime and says, 'Here, my man,' says he, 'is something for your trouble. It's a ramshackle old house and ain't worth two hundred a year, but I'll give you fifty for six months.' Peter was looking at the dime in

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a puzzled sort of way, then he smiled a curious sort of smile and bit the edge before he put it in his pocket. 'You're most too kind, sir,' he says, 'for it has been a great entertainment to me to show you about, and I don't often have the company of a real gentleman. I'm sorry the place is beyond your means, but the fact is that I couldn't afford to let you have it less than two hundred a *month*. I'm sorry,' says he, 'that you had so much trouble for nothing, but I'll just slip this half-dollar into your pocket and you'll have it to spend when you get back to the city.' With that he lays down the overcoat and umbrella and walks out. And for all the fine clothes and jewelry of that man, he used such profane language that I had to ask him to stop or else step outside. That's just like old Peter—he's so touchy there's no getting on with him, though he can be as sweet as pie if he happens to take a fancy to a person. There was once a man——"

At this point Marion adroitly interposed with another question, and in two minutes we were on the road to Waydean. Paul and I straggled along behind, scarcely able to

Peter Waydean is Found Wanting

keep up with Marion's eager pace, as she breathlessly commented upon the delights of living in such a house as the postmistress had described. I became so enthusiastic, in sympathy with her, that by the time we caught a glimpse of the chimneys through a belt of trees I was almost persuaded that open fireplaces and diamond panes were the only essentials of an ideal house. We had been directed to look for the owner at the diminutive cottage he lived in a half mile farther along the road, but with a common impulse we turned in at once to the inviting roadway that led up to the old homestead. On our right a mossy board fence enclosed an old orchard, the gnarled and rugged trunks of the trees set in a carpet of newly sprouted grass, the shadows of the still leafless branches outlined on the knolls and hollows just, as Paul expressed it, like a real colored picture out of a real picture-book.

We hurried along the driveway canopied by the spreading branches of the pines that grew on each side, and rounding a curve we came within sight of a rambling frame house

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set on a knoll with a neatly terraced lawn sloping toward us.

From the moment Paul darted forward with a shout of delight and seated himself on the steps of a diminutive colonial porch we felt the joy of possession. We stood off and surveyed the roof. The shingles were delicately tinted in moss-green and a few bricks were missing from the upper courses of the chimneys, but the glass in the windows was unbroken and the house looked exceedingly habitable and home-like.

The front door was locked, so we peered in at the lower windows and then went round to the rear, finding the kitchen door wide open. Marion entered first and I saw her run across the room and drop on her knees in front of a cavernous brick fireplace with a little cry of delight. By the time I reached her she was emerging from its sooty recesses with a smudged but radiant countenance, smiling exultantly as she swung a rusty iron hook outward.

"What's that thing?" I asked.

"That thing!" she echoed, in pitying incredulity. "Do you mean to say, Henry,

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that you don't know a crane when you see one? "

Before I could plead ignorance she discovered that the ceiling was timbered, the walls wainscoted, and that a settle stood in the dim corner near the fireplace. "It isn't worth while looking at the rest of the house," she said, sitting down on the settle with a smile of perfect content; "you may go and find that old man. Whatever happens, we're going to rent this place, but don't tell him so—bring him to me. In the meantime, remember he's *got* to take a fancy to you, so be just as charming as you know how to be. Oh, you needn't laugh! I know charming doesn't seem the right word to apply to a man, but that's what you are when you do your best. You can be more agreeable than any man I ever knew, and you can be more—but there, do go, *go*—you'd stand around all day if you thought I'd go on talking about you."

There were several points connected with her remarks that I would have liked to have more fully explained, but she was so insistent that I prepared to go, and it was not

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my fault that I didn't start, for we suddenly became aware that Paul was missing. In frantic haste we searched the premises and at last found him sitting on a low mound of freshly turned-up sandy soil at the back of the barn, a batch of sand-cakes neatly laid out on a board beside him. Now Paul had never before sat on the ground, he had never learned how to make any kind of mud-pies, as far as we knew he had never heard of the art, yet some subtle instinct had drawn him to the only spot within reach where there was a heap of suitable soil. The sight was appalling, for it seemed as if our brief forgetfulness must result in his having an attack of pneumonia or some other dreadful ailment. Not a word did we say before Paul, of course, for we are careful not to alarm the dear boy, both for his sake and our own, but we conversed by expressive glances as we walked back toward the house, assuring each other that we must hope for the best and be prepared for the worst, and that by some miracle he might escape.

We had stopped to look down the entrance to a large underground root-house,

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the door of which was open, when from the inside came a succession of feeble groans. There was a heap of bags in the doorway, and in an instant I realized what had happened: that some man had been overcome by the poisonous gases that gather in pits where vegetables are stored.

I am not one who rashly plunges into danger without weighing the consequences, so I didn't bravely lose my life by rushing into the pit in the vain attempt to carry another man out, for I saw there were several good reasons against such a course. First, I knew that I couldn't carry a man anywhere even under the most favorable conditions; second, I couldn't bear to think of the shock to Marion if she should become a widow; third, it was perfectly clear to me that if I remained in the root-house Marion would attempt to save me, then Paul would remain outside and become an orphan, a howling orphan. Further, I was not justified in risking an undoubtedly valuable life for one that was probably of no account.

A long pole with a hook on the end would have been useful, or a piece of rope, but

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neither was to be found, and the groans of the man in the root-house were becoming still more alarming, so, noticing the heavy chain which held the well-bucket, I hurriedly tried to detach it, but to my despair I found it was securely spiked to the well-sweep. It was then that Marion made one of the most brilliant suggestions that I have known her to make: that by swinging the sweep to one side the chain would hang directly over the pit. I don't know that she saw the full utility of this move, but I did. Holding my breath, I stood in the doorway until I could dimly see the prostrate figure on the floor, then I darted inside, looped the chain about him and dragged him to the entrance. He was a heavily built, sharp-featured man, past middle age, and although he lay on the ground and gasped for breath there was a slight contortion of his features that suggested repressed mirth. Marion wanted me to go for help, but I told her that he was recovering and only needed to be moved from the entrance where he lay to the level ground where the air was fresher. She said I would never be able to get him up the

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incline, so I hastened to complete my task, my only fear being that help would arrive too soon. I tenderly arranged a pad of potato bags across his chest and back, then shortening the chain I passed it under his arms and again looped it around his body. All being ready, I climbed up on the weighted end of the well-sweep, but finding there was not enough weight I persuaded Marion to take my place, then I sprang up beside her. The effect was amazing to us, unaccustomed as we were to this primitive contrivance, for our end descended to the ground with a bump, and, like a hooked fish, high in the air dangled the man whom I had gone to so much trouble to save. He emerged from unconsciousness more rapidly than a butterfly from its chrysalis, and his remarks as he gyrated at the end of the chain were most abusive. The epithets were evidently intended for me, and my anger was aroused to such an extent that I felt inclined to let him stay where he was. "Keep cool," I shouted, "and I'll see about getting you down. Remember," I admonished him, "that—that there are ladies in the room. If

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you behave yourself and tell me where to find a ladder, I'll try to help you."

His face grew crimson and he struggled for speech. "A ladder!" he burst forth, at last. "Get off this darn' see-saw."

I got off, so did Marion; but I don't think we understood the proper way to get off, for there was a surprising thud, and I saw that my patient was sprawling on the ground under the beam. I hastened to his relief, reminding him as I unwound the chain that he should have taken my advice and waited for the ladder. He stood up unsteadily, wiping the dirt off his face with his sleeve, then he took off his coat, folded it with ceremony, laid it on the ground and squared up to me.

"Now," he said, with vicious determination, "I'm going to settle with you."

He was such a disreputable and absurd figure that I couldn't help smiling at his demonstrations. "Come, sir," I said persuasively; "you shouldn't give way to your temper. I know that, from your stand-point, it seems annoying to enter a root-house and then discover that you are suspended at the

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end of a well-sweep, but I am not to blame. It would have been far less trouble to me to leave you to be smothered among your potatoes than to drag you out."

I spoke with effect; his expression changed, though he studied my face with suspicion. "What's your name?" he demanded.

"Henry Carton," I responded, with a certain hesitation, born of a diffidence that always seizes me when I try to make this announcement appear unimportant. "And yours?" I asked, genially.

"Waydean," he replied, gruffly.

"Peter Waydean!" I exclaimed, with sudden enthusiasm, as I grasped his hand. "The very man we were looking for! Allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Carton: Marion, Mr. Waydean."

He bowed awkwardly, putting on his coat. "Well sir," he ejaculated, with an explosive laugh, "you do beat the Dutch!"

If our host had been a little remiss on the score of politeness at first, he made up for it by profuse expressions of gratitude and by showing us every attention during the time

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we spent with him in looking over the place. I saw that he had taken a fancy to us, and that he liked the idea of having such desirable tenants, for his clear blue eyes, unusually limpid for an elderly man, beamed with kindly intention as he talked; at the same time, his truthfulness compelled him to say that he couldn't quite forgive me for having hoisted him so high with the well-sweep. "I tell you, Mr. Carton," he said, with a chuckle, "I'm mighty thankful to you for hauling me out of that pit, but all the same, I give you fair warning that I'm bound to get back on you for the way you done it."

After we had viewed the barn and stables we all went into the house to talk over the business. He was a man of strong family affection, so he would never part with the homestead, but we were just the sort of people to take care of what was dear to him, and he would be willing to rent the place to us. He could not live in such a large house himself, on account of his wife being an invalid, but he had often refused to rent it to other people, usually because—well, he

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didn't mind telling us, in confidence, it wasn't every family he would care to have as neighbors—and then, there was such a difference in children! Now that dear little lad of ours, he could swear, had never in his life thrown a stone at a window-pane or pencil-marked wall-paper—a little peaked, wasn't he?—but just wait till he had been six months at Waydean, and had bunnies and guinea-pigs, and chickens, turkeys, lambs and calves, and a pony of his own—just wait!

It was indeed a delicate matter for me to mention pecuniary compensation. Perhaps if I had been alone I would have ignored that point altogether, but Marion's significant glances I could not ignore, so, though it sounded positively brutal in the face of his disinterested appreciation of our worth, I asked him the rent.

He made a gesture implying utter indifference. The fact was that, though most of the people in the neighborhood were grasping and mean-minded, he was a man who was built straight-up-and-down-and-square-all-round, and what he considered above

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everything was that he would have congenial neighbors. The farm was worth—well, he wouldn't say what it was worth, but I might have it at three hundred dollars a year. There were fifty acres of land that would grow enough produce to pay the rent of the whole place and something over, and as I would need a good many implements he would sell me his for a fraction of their cost, and if I wanted a good team of horses and a few cows all I had to do was to make my choice among his.

I had been fascinated by the frankly ingenuous assurance of his manner; in fact, I was mentally exulting in my good fortune in finding such a generous landlord, when the sound of Marion's voice aroused me.

"Fifty acres, Mr. Waydean!" she exclaimed. "That would never do. My husband is quite opposed to the idea of trying to make money by farming, and——"

"Oh, quite," I interjected, shaking my head with emphasis.

"We want to live in the country," she continued, "but we can't afford to actually farm."

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"Between ourselves, Mr. Waydean," I hastened to say, "I've seen so much of city people fooling away money in farming that I've made up my mind not to work any more land than I can attend to with a spade, a rake and a hoe."

He stared at us in turn, incredulity giving place to gloom as he realized that I was serious; then he turned to Marion in a burst of candor. "I tell you what, ma'am," he said, with warm approval, "I ain't met many men with so much downright common-sense as your husband. I'll own that I'm a bit sorry that he don't want to work the farm, for I'm getting old and I'd like a rest, but the truth is that running a farm costs a lot of money, and farmers come out at the wrong end of the horn most years. However, you've took a fancy to the place and I've took a shine to you, so I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll work the farming land myself, and you can take the house and grounds for four hundred a year."

Peter stood in the attitude of an auctioneer who is forced to throw away a desirable no-reserve lot on the first bid; surely,

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then, my ears had deceived me into thinking that this was a larger sum than he had asked for the whole farm.

Marion was the first to speak. "I don't quite see," she began dubiously, "isn't that *more?*"

"Certainly, ma'am," he responded; "but how far'd a hundred dollars go in wages for hired help? If I wasn't throwing in my work free I couldn't afford to take them fifty acres off your hands at that figure. Of course, I'd sooner you took the hull place at three hundred, then as much more would hire you a man, and if Mr. Carton looked after him pretty sharp there might be enough crop to feed your horses and cow, and he wouldn't have to spend more than a thousand dollars in stock and implements to start with."

I was slightly irritated that he addressed these remarks solely to Marion; one might have supposed that he thought she was the head of the family and that I was not even a party of the first part.

"I'll think the matter over," I began, with dignified hauteur, "and let you——"

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Peter turned to me hastily. "That's as reasonable as I can do," he explained, with plaintive determination; "and I've got to know right away if you want the place."

"Well," I began, with an eager eye on Marion for the cue, "I—I——"

"There's another man after it," urged Peter, "and he's coming to-morrow for my answer."

Marion gasped. "We'd better pay the—the four"—

"The four hundred," I decided, for her, "and let you run the farm."

"Done," snapped Peter.

It was evening when we parted from Peter Waydean on the station platform. He shook me warmly by the hand as the train appeared.

"You're a gentleman, Mr. Carton, from the word go," he shouted hoarsely in my ear. "The bargain's made, and though there's no writing betwixt us, there's no need of any, for we're men of honor. I'll tell the other man"—

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"Yes, certainly," I assented, detaching myself as the train slowed up.

"Not a word to the neighbors about the well-sweep, or about what you're paying for the place," he continued, holding the lapel of my coat. "They're a prying, gossiping lot, and I wouldn't like it known that you hoisted me on that darn see-saw. It's the first time Peter Waydean was ever treed, but considering that you're the man that done it, we'll cry quits."

As I caught a flashing steely glint in the depths of his ingenuous blue eyes the conviction was borne in upon me that, like the simulated stillness of a deadly revolving tool, his simplicity and truth were more apparent than real. And this was the impression that made me so silent and thoughtful on our journey back to the city.

For the close of such an eventful day we had little to say to each other. With every mile that we travelled an unpleasant suspicion grew stronger as I thought over the bargain with that guileful man; gradually the suspicion changed to a certainty, and then it was that I became aware that

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Marion, who had also been strangely silent, was studying me with a tantalizing air of knowing my thoughts.

"What is it?" I asked, with sudden annoyance.

"I was just thinking," she began, then she stopped to laugh gleefully—"do you remember what the postmistress said about him skin"—

"Don't repeat it," I snapped, squirming. "Of course I remember, but I don't see the application."

"Well, you shouldn't expect to if there isn't any," she said, with renewed mirth. "It was odd, too, that he warned you he'd pay you back for hoisting him."

"Will you be kind enough to explain the connection?" I demanded fiercely.

It really is unsafe to use that tone with Marion. There was a little flash in her eyes; my glare faltered, then her brief resentment melted into sympathy.

"Connection?" she answered. "Why, what connection *could* there be?"

My hand sought hers, in gratitude. There was a pause, then we both laughed, and

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somehow the bitterness of knowing I had been gulled passed away ; I even felt a sympathetic appreciation of his artistic touch in assuring me that we were both men of honor.

Suddenly Marion grasped my arm. " Henry," she exclaimed, " he's the man you want ! "

" The man I want ? "

" Why, yes ; didn't you say you wanted a central figure for that set of rural sketches you've planned ? "

" By Jove," I cried, with kindling enthusiasm, " he's a character all ready made ! If I do him justice, he'll be a—a regular gold mine."

I was rather puzzled by a meaning, but to me, inscrutable smile that lingered on Marion's face after this comment, but she so often sees more in a remark of mine than I do that I prefer not to spoil the effect by asking for an explanation.

III

AN UPHEAVAL

THE April day on which we moved to Waydean was an ideal one in regard to weather, and my arrangements came so near to perfection that we began the usually irksome work of moving with joyous zest. I had chalked a number on every piece of furniture and box of sundries, also on the door of each room in the farm-house, so as to avoid having the kitchen stove carried upstairs and the bedroom furniture placed in the parlor, and this plan elicited warm approbation from Marion. To say that her approval gratified me scarcely expresses my elation, for although I was proud of the plan I was quite prepared to have her point out some fatal defect. I can indulge in platitudes and commonplaces with impunity, but a really original, trade-marked idea is usually a gauntlet flung into the

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arena, the activity of my mind producing a reflex action upon hers. In this case I took extraordinary care to provide against anything happening to mar the successful carrying out of my scheme, not even closing the bargain with the owner of the moving van until he had indorsed it with enthusiasm. This man, Bliggs by name, urged me to patent the idea, waxing as indignant as if I had impugned his moral character when I modestly demurred.

"Look 'ere, Mr. Carton," he snapped, "wot could be more simpler? W'en there's a man or a woman a-standin' at the door shoutin' to be keerful an' hurry up, an' put this 'ere an' that there, an' hobstructin' gin'rally, there's bound to be trouble. W'y, in Lunnon you don't ketch the bobbies botherin' about common drunks in movin' season, for they knows there's goin' to be a full docket of assaults an' batteries an' 'busive langwidges. W'y, with your plan there wouldn't be none o' that, for a man 'd jest onload 'is dray as mum as a trained pig a-pickin' hout cards. Mr. Carton," he concluded, "Hi'll put every blessed piece in the

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right room an' set up yer kitchen stove an' bedstids free."

My heart warmed to Bliggs, for his active movements as he loaded the wagon inspired me with confidence, and when he drove off with his two helpers I had not a doubt but that he would carry out his cheerful assurances.

It was late in the afternoon by the time we locked the door of our dismantled house. The click of the lock sent a lump into my throat that caused me to turn quickly away, but Marion lingered, heaving a little sigh of regret. It is a peculiarity of hers to look back if that process is at all likely to result in a sigh; for my own part, I prefer to look straight ahead if I suspect there is to be any attempt to stir up my well of emotion, and, in consequence, on rare occasions I have been called cold-blooded. Paul is different in this respect; he is the dividing line between us. Marion caught him younger, and his plastic little soul has been moulded with loving care. He is sympathetic and responsive. He is not like any one musical instrument; he is like

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two. As easily moved as an Æolian harp, he has the fire, spirit and continuity of the bagpipes.

"Look, Paul!" said his mother tenderly, her eyes moistening. "Say 'Good-by, old house.'"

It was, at the least, an injudicious remark. Up to that moment we had been positively gleeful, and Paul had looked upon the change as a glorified picnic, for I had taken pains to instil the belief that Waydean would be an earthly elysium for a small boy; but now, with a woman's pensive touch, my carefully built fabric collapsed. Paul's big solemn eyes grew cloudy; a faint crescent appeared on each side of his mouth, deepening gradually. I watched this development in dumb despair, while Marion was absorbed in tender reminiscence, then, before I could utter a warning cry, his mouth shot open to the amazing degree that I knew so well. I grabbed him hastily, kneeling down. "Listen, Paul!" I shouted into his ear. "We'll move back—to-morrow—if you like."

I stood up suddenly, amazed; a hand had clutched my collar and almost pulled me

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backward—Marion's flashing eyes met mine. "Such a falsehood!" she gasped. "How dare you!"

I did not hear these words, but I knew what she said by the motion of her lips; besides, her manner made it perfectly plain that I was supposed to have infringed the truth, so speech was superfluous. As a matter of fact I could have disproved the charge, but not before Paul, for we strive to avoid discussing such matters before him; anyway, I would have needed a megaphone to make myself heard. Therefore, I stepped humbly aside, with a gesture that indicated my complete willingness to leave the matter to his mother.

"Paul, dear,—listen," she called out, bending over him; "we're not going to move back—*ever*."

The effect was instantaneous; he dropped to the sidewalk, renewing his efforts as he wriggled in anguish. I was obliged to pick him up in accordance with Marion's frantic gestures, and we retreated into the empty house, where she pacified him in course of time. I do not know the precise method she

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adopted, but I think, from snatches of conversation that reached me, that beautiful native birds figured largely—among others, storks! I know that storks do not grow at Waydean, yet I preserved a grim silence, thinking what a strong case I might make, were I not too generous to do so.

I was justly indignant, for I do not seem to be able to make Marion understand that, like her, I have a horror of untruth; in fact, I am more cautious in my statements than any other journalist I know; but while I am placidly content to accept any assertion of hers without question, she is likely to quibble over almost every statement I make. I admit that I am forgetful, that to-morrow I may say exactly the opposite to what I say to-day, that what I condemn in the abstract may seem to me expedient and proper under certain conditions, but I object to being openly accused of prevarication. Paul, as I have said, is not an ordinary child (and although people who are not his parents are inclined to use a compassionate tone in making that remark, I do so with defiant pride), therefore he should

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be treated with tactful consideration not accorded to common children. He responds to my sympathetic touch, I am glad to say, with sweet concords; that is, of course, if my elbow is not joggled by his mother. In this case, though I spoke in haste, my words would have stopped Paul's outcry had Marion left him to me, and had she not been prone to suspicion she would have seen that my statement was absolutely truthful. I knew that the child had been moved by a passing sentiment and would be more than content with our new home once he was transplanted, but I was deeply grieved at his mother suspecting me of being so base as not to be willing to move back to the city the next day *if Paul liked*.

We had missed the first afternoon train, and after a dreary wait for the next one we arrived at the little country station just at dusk, and before we reached Waydean darkness had fallen. We groped our way around to the back door and stumbled into the kitchen, where I lit a candle I had brought. My heart sank at the first glance about the room, for it was quite empty and

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I feared that our goods had not arrived, but when I peered fearfully into the next room I saw that what looked at first like a railroad box-car was a rectangular erection of all our household belongings. We stared incredulously by the light of the flickering candle, walking around the structure in despair. Next the ceiling, like a statue on its massive base, our cooking-stove perched giddily—Bliggs had set it up with a vengeance!—on the very bottom lay all our beds and bedding, hopelessly buried, for if I attempted to disturb the pile, down would plunge that threatening mass of metal. Bliggs was a fiend!

A strip of torn wall-paper hung down like a banner from a projecting curtain-pole; it was covered with rude pencillings, which we deciphered together after Paul had dropped asleep on my overcoat, with this result:

Mister Carton.

heluv a rode.

hosses nere ded.

men kickt.

basht em fur emtin botel.

basht em fur mutinin bout histin stov.

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to dark to ce chok marks.

done nex bes stile.

heluv a gob wel dun.

wilyum bliggs.

I opened the kitchen door and looked despairingly out into the darkness; the twinkling light of the next farm-house shone far away like a star on the horizon; I must go over there and ask for food and lodging as if we were penniless wayfarers. Marion stood beside me, and together we tried to assure each other that the people whose light looked so cheery must be warm-hearted and hospitable enough to make us welcome. As we gazed, a second light appeared near the farm-house; evidently some person had come out with a lantern, for we could hear his carolling whistle accompanying the gliding movement of the light. It was coming nearer, for we could soon make out the lilting melody of the whistler and the encircling glow that surrounded him, and I felt Marion's grasp tighten on my arm with a sudden hope that had also sprung up in my breast. Nearer and nearer he came, until the globe of light grew larger

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and cast titanic shadows of a pair of nimble legs that passed around the end of the barn, through the yard, up to our very door, where we stood spellbound; then the whistle ceased, the lantern was raised, and by its dazzling glow we saw a little man with kindly gray eyes and thin reddish whiskers standing there.

“Good-evenin’!” he called out, cheerily. “We heard there was some people movin’ in to-day, and we thought you might be kinder upsot, so I come to see if you wouldn’t step along over to our place and have supper and stay the night. The missis has the beds ready, and Sairey knows how to fix things comfortable.”

There was a moment’s awkward pause, for we were dumb with excess of emotion.

“You don’t know my name, and I don’t know yours,” he proceeded. “Mine’s Andy Taylor, and my place is next south, over there where you see that light.”

I clutched his hand. “Mr. Taylor,” I gasped, “come in. I was afraid you were an angel—perhaps you are, but we—we’re awfully glad to see you.”

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"It's so good" — began Marion, then she collapsed.

"Why, where's your load?" he asked, looking around the vacant room.

I showed him, while Marion held the candle aloft. I related my wrongs with passionate fervor; I exhibited the Bliggs epistle, translating the rude characters as I traced them with a trembling forefinger and called down vengeance on the head of the perpetrator. A spasm shot across my visitor's face and his wide-open mouth closed with a snap; he leaned forward helplessly as if a sneeze had seized him, then a wild outburst of hilarity smote our astonished ears. "Oh, Lordy, Lordy!" he groaned. "The upliftin' power" — he pointed upward to the stove — "of — of strong drink!"

Andy Taylor's lantern shed its cheering rays over us as he led the way across the fields to the distant beacon-light of his house. Forlorn, homesick, discouraged, as we had been, his friendly hospitality filled us with gratitude too deep for words. His unquestioning acceptance of us as guests

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was staggering, accustomed as we were to the artificial restrictions of social intercourse in the city. As Marion said afterward, I might have been a temporarily retired burglar who had eloped with another man's wife and kidnapped a child, or we might have been dangerous lunatics, or worse,—we might have been vulgar people! But yet, with the all-embracing charity that thinketh no evil, Andy's sprightly step led us from the chaotic discomfort of our new home to the warmth and cheer that awaited us in his. No wonder, then, that Marion wept like a tired child on the shoulder of the motherly old lady who welcomed us, or that Andy, after one glance at my expressive face, backed away with a hurried remark about having to attend to the fire. Later, when Paul had been put to sleep in an old-fashioned billowy feather bed, we settled ourselves in the kitchen for a smoke. We could hear from the sitting-room the continuous restful murmur of the women's voices, rising and falling in the responsive cadences of that sweet communion that betokens, even in the most prosaic utterances,

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the mingling of kindred spirits of the gentle sex. I look back upon that evening as one of the pleasantest I ever spent, and I enjoyed to the full the quaint sayings and funny stories of the genial little man who entertained me.

The clock struck eleven before either of us noticed the lateness of the hour. Andy rose reluctantly, knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"Well, Mr. Carton," said he, "I'm mighty glad you're goin' to be a neighbor of mine. The women-folk seem to have hit it off, too," he added, opening the door into the next room, "and"——

He stopped speaking, and a look of astonishment crossed his face as a tumultuous babel of conversation reached our ears. The voices no longer rose and fell—they rose steadily, each dominating the other, it seemed, and yet—marvel of marvels!—in perfect amity, though they no longer responded but spoke at one and the same time.

"If it was two men?" whispered Andy, with a chuckle.

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"Exactly," I replied; "it would mean a fight."

We listened intently. It was a problem—simple to the speakers—of gussets, and pleats, and back widths, and yet not one connected sentence could we hear.

"I tell you what, Mr. Carton," said Andy, in his hoarse whisper, "I've been married forty-two years, and I ain't found anything yet as entertainin' as the ways of a woman."

"Well," I suggested, "what about the ways of two women?"

Andy doubled himself over in silent glee; as for me, I felt that I had said something rather neat, and tried not to smile myself. Just then the voices in the next room suddenly ceased.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Taylor. "It's after eleven. I wonder what them men is talkin' about so quiet in the kitchen. If your husband lets him, Andy'll jest talk him blind, once he gets started."

Marion laughed merrily. "Why, Mrs. Taylor," she said, "how absurd! You don't know Henry, or you wouldn't say that."

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"Talk about women gossipin', as men do, Mrs. Carton, I believe there's more gossip goes on among the men down at the post-office every day than all the women round here do in a week. Now Andy"——

At that moment Andy softly shut the door, shuffled a chair across the floor ostentatiously and announced in a loud tone that it was time to get to bed.

IV.

THE EDUCATION OF GRIGGS

WE had lived for two months at Waydean, and, although as far as agricultural operations were concerned we might as well have been in the city, I had begun to appreciate the delights of a country life without the usual drudgery, worry and expense. I was not raising grain at two dollars a bushel to sell for fifty cents, or making butter at a cost of a dollar a pound to sell for a quarter of a dollar, but I had time during the hot weather to enjoy the sight of Peter Waydean's waving fields as I swung in a hammock under the trees, while that old sinner frizzled in the glaring sunlight over his work. Occasionally I refreshed myself by sauntering to the field where he happened to be working, to have a little friendly conversation with him, and I never failed to let him know that new beauties were revealed to me day by day in

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the agreement to pay him an extra hundred dollars for working his own land. At first he had showed signs of looking upon me with the contemptuous irritation of an angler who has accidentally landed a mud-pout, but when I artlessly hinted that I would have been willing to pay a higher rent for the place rather than make a slave of myself as he did, I could see that his previous delight in his own cleverness was completely overshadowed by the bitter regret that he had not made more of his opportunity.

We had no cattle of our own, but Peter's were in plain view in the lower field. We had no sheep, but Peter's little flock picturesquely dotted the landscape. We didn't own a horse, but, after all, Marion had a terror of being run away with, and I had made an inflexible rule never to go within range of a horse's hind legs. And in the matter of confining my farm expenditure to the price of a spade, a rake and a hoe, I had been most loyal and consistent; I had stuck not only to the letter of our agreement, but also to the spirit. Indeed,

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I was not merely resigned, but cheerful, knowing that the more closely I appeared to cling to Marion's plan the sooner would she begin to waver.

But a chance remark that I overheard Abner Davis make one morning as I boarded the train changed my mental attitude in an instant. "He ain't no reg'lar farmer—oh, Jiminy, no!—ha, ha!—he's jest"—How he finally labelled me to his fellow-rustic I never heard, for the train slowed up at the platform, and his voice was drowned in the noise. I just had time to turn, before I stepped on board, to cast a withering glance backwards—a glance that was wasted, however, for Abner was poking the other man in the side with his thumb and they were both doubled over with merriment. Of course, he hadn't intended me to hear, and I was quite aware that I was not a farmer, either regular or irregular, but it was this fact that made the remark so galling. There are two things I cannot bear: one is what Marion calls the truth, for that always turns out to be something odious and objectionable; the other

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is ridicule. That morning my mind was filled with bitterness, for Abner Davis had managed to combine in one brief remark the essence of much that I disliked to hear. The rhythmic beat of the car-wheels clanked out the derisive refrain, "He ain't—no reg—'lar far—mer!" By the time I reached the city I had decided it was due to my self-respect to put things on a different basis. Certainly, I was not a farmer. I had neither a horse, nor a cow, nor a sheep—no, not even a guinea-pig! I had no agricultural implements, except,—oh, hateful thought!—a spade, a rake and a hoe.

I was in this mood when Harold Jones unloaded Griggs upon me in the restaurant where I was taking lunch. I knew from the twinkle in Harold's eye when he introduced us that he meant mischief. "Griggs," he explained to me, "has got farm-on-the-brain. Carton," he explained to Griggs, "had such a severe attack that his mind is unhinged. He imagines—ha, ha!—that he's a farmer! Now you two sit down and exchange symptoms. I have to get back to the office."

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I treated Griggs with distant civility, not because he was thrust upon me, but because it usually takes me a year or more to get beyond formalities with an acquaintance. But Griggs was impervious to hauteur; he was unconstrained and hearty enough for two. I could see that Harold had spoken the truth in his case, for his farming mania was at its height, and he was overjoyed at finding a man who had done what he merely dreamed of doing. He was a produce commission merchant, he told me, and he was convinced that he could double his income and prolong his life by running a farm in connection with his business. It was a simple proposition, he stated, that a child could grasp. A farmer makes a profit by farming, a commission merchant by commissioning; therefore, if the merchant were also a farmer would he not absorb both profits?

Griggs tilted his chair, hooked his thumbs into his waistcoat, and challenged me to point out a flaw in his theory. I declined, for the simple reason, I said, that it was flawless; then I rose to make my escape.

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Griggs adjured me to sit down for a minute; he had a few questions to ask, and I was the man of all men to give him the information he sought.

Now a stitch in time, it is said, saves nine; a lie, a little one, a mere clerical plea of a pressing engagement, would have saved ninety or more. Had I not instinctively refrained from loosening one stitch in my garment of righteousness it would not have been torn to tatters.

I hesitated; I sat down; I was lost. Griggs grew friendly, more friendly, affectionate; he addressed me by my surname, and I realized that I was in the clutches of the objectionable type of person who claps you on the back at the second meeting, and demands with a boisterous laugh, "How goes it, old man?"

Beginning with generalities pertaining to agriculture, he questioned me searchingly upon my private affairs. I can parry, and occasionally thrust—but not against a battering-ram. Grigg's questions were not to be evaded. I could have declined point-blank to answer, thus intimating that he was

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a boor, but that would have been unpleasant to me—perhaps not to Griggs. I could have followed my natural inclination by telling the truth, but I recoiled from laying bare to a stranger the peculiar economies of our rural life ; besides, I shrink from intrusion with the same shyness that causes me to slink guiltily into a shop if I see a man approaching who is indebted to me. There was but one other alternative ; I took it. I smiled my most frankly ingenuous smile ; I beamed upon him with warm-hearted encouraging candor and—lied ! Yes, lied with beggarly duplicity, and I kept on with Spartan fortitude ; and so smooth is the grade on the broad and downward road that presently I was enjoying my own depravity. My imaginings no longer appeared as ugly bloated caterpillars, but spun themselves swiftly into chrysalides and instantly emerged as gorgeous butterflies, dazzling to their creator. And yet my mind remained alert and clear. Every statement that I made was notched deeply into my own brain, so that I could afterwards recall the slightest detail ; into Griggs's also, for

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he snapped at, swallowed and assimilated every fragment of information with the avidity of a starved dog. We began in this way:—

“How many acres in your farm?”.....
“Fifty.” (It really was my farm, for I was paying more than the rent of the whole place to Peter.)

“How many horses?”.....“Five—two working teams and a fast driver.” (Fortunately, I knew Peter’s stable.)

“Cows? .. Calves?” “Three cows—seven calves.” (I was pretty sure of the cows, but I had to guess the calves.)

“Jupiter! You never raised seven calves from three cows?”.....“Oh, yes. Three pair of twins—the odd one is last year’s.”

“Last year’s! Thought you had only been farming two months?”.....“Yes, but I bought one calf with her mother.”

“Three pair of twins first season! Great Cæsar—what luck! What did you pay for the farm?”.....“Six thousand, two hundred and fifty.”

“Cash?”.....“Cash.”

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"The devil! You must be well fixed?"
....."Oh,—so, so."

"How'd you make it?"....."Emperor stock."

"Emperor! You must have been in on the ground floor?"....."Ground floor."

"Oh Lord! How many men do you keep?"....."Just one."

"What do you have to pay him?".....
"Three hundred a year."

"Must be a nice place for children. How many have you?"....."Five." (This was theoretically correct. Paul had invented two sisters and two brothers, all invisible, to play with. A man's family should be screened from publicity, and this reply seemed to make Paul strictly impersonal. He did not ask me how many wives I had.)

Now I looked upon this person as a man whom I would never meet again, never having met him before, and I parted from him with joy after having answered every question that he asked to his satisfaction, also to my own. I did not dream of entering a maze that would exhaust my ingenuity to find my way out of without ignominiously

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crying for help. But before I was done with Griggs I recalled many things of which I had never seen the full significance before. One was a tract I had read in my youth entitled, "The First False Step." Another was a remark that Marion had once made in anger: that I would say anything, without regard to veracity or the immediate future, to avoid unpleasantness. I had got her to retract the assertion to a certain extent by professing to be deeply wounded, as indeed I was, but I saw now that she knew me better than I knew myself.

Two days later, on my next trip to the city, I found Griggs awaiting me in my office. "Hello, old man!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "I haven't been able to sleep since I saw you—can't think of anything but getting out to see your farm. Why, Carton, what's—what the dev"—

"Stand back," I cried warningly, with averted face and outstretched arm—"keep well away! I'm—I'm in trouble. My boy—my boy—" I sank into my chair and covered my face with my hands.

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Griggs staggered back. "Which one?" he gasped.

"*Which*—oh,—ah—Andrew," I answered despairingly. "He broke out last night—I'm afraid it's—" I bowed my head.

"It's *what*?" demanded Griggs, moving rapidly away.

"Scarlet fever," I groaned.

Griggs vanished. "Say, Carton," he called out, from the other side of the door, "awfully sorry. Other kids all safe?"

I laughed—a hard metallic laugh—I knew it sounded like that, for I seemed to stand off and listen. Griggs didn't wait to hear more. "Hell!" he ejaculated, and his heavy footsteps pounded the stairs.

I thought that was the last of Griggs. It was—for nearly two months. By that time my point of view had changed, as the danger of complications receded, so that I sometimes found myself chuckling over the clever way in which I had managed to rid myself of an insufferable bore. I did not mention the matter to Marion, for I well knew that in some things she was incapable

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of judicial consideration, without regard to qualifying circumstances; then, reasoning and argument availed not. An act, she insists, is either right or wrong, therefore it is useless to juggle with words in trying to make out that it is mostly right and only a little wrong. Had Marion developed artistic ability, I am sure it would have been in the line of black and white, while my talent would as surely have run to color. It is the moral in a fable that appeals most strongly to her; it is the fable itself that delights my imagination. A moral is all very well in its place,—like a capstone to a tower,—but there it should stay. To detach it for the purpose of concrete personal application, I have explained to Marion, is an outrage on the proprieties of family life. To choose the moment when a man is smarting under the consciousness of error for the purpose of pointing out the folly of his foolishness is positively inhuman. What, I ask, would have been the moral effect upon the prodigal had his father prepared a feast of proverbs instead of a fatted calf? This question she has never answered except by

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a baffling tight-lipped smile,—a smile that convinces me of the utter folly of hoping that a woman will listen to reason. Yes, I had good cause to believe that mentioning the Griggs episode would lead to useless discussion.

It was a warm day in midsummer when I found a note from Griggs in my morning mail. He had learned at the office that I was spending my vacation at home, and he concluded that all danger of infection was over.

“ . . . Now, old chap,” he wrote, “ I can’t wait any longer ; I’ve got to have a look at your place. My wife has been dead against my buying a farm, but she has given in this much : that if I can find a city man who gets more out of his farm than he puts into it, she’ll let me go ahead. So you’re my man, Carton. I want you to give me the tip in regard to facts and figures, and if you have to dress them up a bit, like the Annual Report of a Loan and Investment Company, you may do so, with my blessing. I’m no good in that line myself, but I’m strong on a second-hand affidavit. I’ll

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drive out on Thursday afternoon to have a look around your farm, then you can post me on details."

It was nine o'clock when I received this epistle. Griggs, I calculated, could not arrive before the middle of the afternoon, and he would probably not stay more than an hour or two, so as to leave time to drive back to the city by daylight. The problem that confronted me was whether it would be worse for me to tell the truth to Griggs, or to Marion, or to both, or to risk the probability of Marion learning it from Griggs, or of the latter from my wife. I shrank from each solution in turn, and yet, worst of all, was the thought of being burdened any longer by the secret of my own guilt. I could have made up my mind to confess to Marion had I not been sure that she would insist upon Griggs being told the instant he arrived. That thought hardened my heart. I had gone too far to retreat; Griggs should be deceived to the bitter end.

It was at this stage of my mental conflict that the thought of confiding in Andy Taylor came to me as a sudden inspiration.

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That dear old soul, I felt sure, would take a positive delight in helping me out of this difficulty; indeed, I thought of borrowing his farm for the afternoon, until a better plan presented itself. I couldn't see the humorous side of the matter very clearly just then, but I knew Andy would. He did. I found him hoeing his corn, but he willingly left his work and sat down in a shady spot with me to listen to my tale. I did not attempt to excuse myself; in fact, I was rather more severe in my self-condemnation than I thought the circumstances warranted. I wanted sympathy and encouragement; I wanted to be assured that I wasn't as miserable a sinner as I declared myself to be; and I knew that, in dealing with Marion, the way to get what I yearned for was to assume the most abject repentance. But my serious air failed to impress Andy, for he was so delighted with the humor of the situation that, at first, he gave himself up to unrestrained merriment. I had to paint my despair still more vividly before he subsided into helpful contemplation.

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“To tell you the *truth*, Mr. Carton”—I winced at the word, and at the wink that accompanied it—“I think it’s a darn good joke.” He stopped to laugh once more, and I permitted a sorrowful smile to steal over my face. “And as for my opinion of your conduct,” he went on, “I believe you’re jest a nateral-born play-actor.” I started in surprise, for this was not the kind of consolation I had expected. “That bein’ the case,” he concluded, “you ain’t no ways blamable.”

“Why, how do you make that out?” I asked, trying to conceal my elation.

“You done it,” he answered, chewing a piece of June grass meditatively, with his eyes half-closed, “as innocent as that little boy of yourn when he makes believe he has all them brothers and sisters. You ain’t got all the live-stock that you described, but you want ’em so bad that your imagination sort of got a cinch on your judgment.”

I grasped his hand in speechless gratitude,—not only for the charitable view he took of my conduct, but also that he had pointed out the way to disarm Marion’s

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criticism when the time came for me to confess my misdeeds. I looked at my watch. In three or four hours Griggs would appear ; there was no time to lose.

" Mr. Taylor," I said, hesitatingly, not knowing just how to broach my plan, " having gone so far, I—I don't quite see my way clear, except—by going a little farther."

Andy nodded in perfect comprehension. " See that strip of tamarac swamp over there? " he asked. " Well, it ain't no more'n half a mile wide, and it'd come nateral to me to cut through there in a bee line, but if you was to try, the chances is that every bit of it would look like every other bit, and you'd be glad to git out even on the side you started in on."

" I would," I admitted. " If I could only start afresh! "

Andy chuckled again. " Well," he said, with hearty encouragement, " I'm prepared to holler round the edge, or go in to look you up, or anything you say. Now, what's your scheme? "

" It struck me," I replied, casting aside my embarrassment, " that perhaps you

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wouldn't mind lending me some stage furniture for the afternoon." I enumerated the required number of horses, cattle, hogs, and sheep.

Andy laughed in glee, then he shook his head in assumed solemnity. "No, Mr. Carton," he said, "I couldn't do that, but I'll give 'em to you outright; then, if you like, you can give 'em back to me in the evenin'."

I was touched by his evident desire to save me from any unnecessary perversion of the truth, but I assured him that Griggs would not think of asking me if the animals he saw on my place were my own; besides, I would feel overwhelmed by the munificence of this temporary gift. But Andy was obdurate, so I let him have his way. There was just one other difficulty—that of getting my wife away from Waydean for the afternoon, but that was easily arranged. I remembered that she was in the first stage of the rag-carpet fever, and had announced her intention of getting Mrs. Taylor to instruct her in the art, so when Andy brought me into the house to have a drink of fresh

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buttermilk, I had only to hint at Marion's desire to learn in order to secure a pressing invitation from Mrs. Taylor to bring her over in the afternoon.

Andy accompanied me to the gate. "Mr. Carton, keep up your spirits," he said encouragingly, in parting, "and everything will go all right. You needn't feel nervous about your wife gittin' back too soon, for when two women gits started rag-carpetin' they don't remember they've got husbands until on about supper-time. When they settle down we'll drive the stock over and arrange them to look nateral. I was goin' to wash my buggy this afternoon, and I was thinkin' I might as well do it over there. I ain't had no experience of play-actin', but you need someone to look like a hired man, and I guess I could do that."

I had thought of the hired man problem, and the same idea had occurred to me, but I knew it wasn't my place to make the suggestion. "No, Mr. Taylor," I replied; "I couldn't think of letting you take such a menial part. I'd rather give up the performance—" I wilted suddenly at his look

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of sceptical amusement—"unless," I added, "you would really like to do it."

"I really would," he responded, with a broad smile.

Griggs came. To my amazement, he asked no questions, at first. He had a business-like, preoccupied air, as if he were a bailiff preparing an inventory for a bill-of-sale, and he looked at me, I fancied, as if he suspected I had hastily hidden some of the effects that might legally be attached. He scarcely noticed Peter's growing crops, but he studied the domestic animals intently, jotting down memoranda in his notebook. The inspection evidently satisfied him that they were not stuffed, although in their unfamiliar surroundings the cattle wore a strained and unnatural expression, as if they thought he was an amateur photographer, and feared they might not be taken full face. His manner exasperated me, but I managed to treat him politely, even when he remarked that my hired man was a rum-looking old coon and that the horses needed grooming.

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Suddenly he shut his note-book with a snap. "Carton," he burst forth, "I've been taken in!"

"Taken—in?" I ejaculated. He had an equine cast of countenance, and his eyes rolled in such a vicious way that I instinctively moved directly in front, looking at him fixedly. My surprise was not assumed.

"Duped — bamboozled — hoodwinked!" he snorted.

I grew pale with rage. I knew I did, though I could not see myself. My eyes flashed; I could feel them flashing. I would have given five dollars to see their scintillations in a mirror. I drew myself up to more than my full height—thank Heaven, I could at least see myself elongate! Andy Taylor, standing beside his buggy with a sopping sponge in one hand, his mouth hanging open and his reddish side-whiskers floating in the breeze, suddenly turned his back and hugged himself, his shoulders heaving in silent spasmodic convulsions.

"Mr. Griggs," I said icily, my tone, I was pleased to hear, as pale and frosty as a

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shaft of the aurora borealis, "what do you mean?"

"What do I mean?" he shouted. "I mean that I'll pay Harold Jones back for this—I'll teach him not to run a rig on me!"

"Harold—Jones?" I queried vacantly.

Griggs burst into a laugh that sounded like a horse's neigh. "Brace up, old man," he adjured me, slapping me on the back. "You don't seem to get on to my meaning, but you don't need to look like an idiot. I'll tell you the whole business."

Briefly, it seemed, he had happened to meet my friend Harold that day, and had mentioned his proposed visit to my farm; incidentally, a warm discussion had arisen. Harold had been convulsed with merriment at Griggs's conception of the extensive scope of my farming operations. When Griggs adduced his conversation with me as evidence Harold had laughed still more uproariously, declaring it was the best joke he ever heard—further, that my live-stock consisted of five old hens and some chickens. Griggs knew Harold to be fond of

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joking, but had, reluctantly, believed him. He had not expected, he admitted, to see such a well-stocked farm.

"In other words," I said, with some heat, "you expected to find that I"——

"Hold up!" interrupted Griggs hastily. "You see, Carton, I was mad at the thought of having been made a fool of. I can understand a fellow lying on a business deal, when it's to his interest, but to sit down and lie cold-bloodedly, just for recreation, like"——

"Like whom?" I demanded wrathfully, as he paused.

"Like that brute Jones," answered Griggs, with a vicious jerk of his head. "I'll get back on him, you bet!"

I began to see daylight. "Come away up to the house and we'll have a little refreshment," I said, with hospitable zeal.

Griggs brightened. It was a warm day, so I brought him around to the south veranda, but I would have entertained him anywhere else had I remembered that Paul was there. He was curled up in a chair, absorbed in a book. I knew he was obliv-

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ious of what had been going on, but there is never any certainty of what Paul may, or may not, say, and I felt a qualm of misgiving. Griggs proceeded to attract his attention by snapping his fingers, as if the boy were a puppy or an infant, remarking, to me, that he was wondering where I kept the kids. Now Paul is not shy, but we never could induce him to notice a stranger's advances without being formally introduced, consequently, if his mind is suddenly withdrawn from his imaginary world, he looks shy; worse, he looks as if he were unseeing, deaf, and an idiot. My mind was preoccupied, or I would have avoided difficulties by introducing Griggs, but I unfortunately neglected that formality. Paul's stolid and incurious gaze rested on my visitor; I looked on spellbound, knowing that his mind was working with intensity, and that something was coming; Griggs shuffled uneasily.

"Well, sonny," said Griggs, at last, "what do you think of me?"

I have watched a toad sit motionless waiting for a fly to come within reach with

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exactly Paul's expression. I noticed that his eyelids didn't even blink. Griggs glanced at me ; I felt, rather than saw, the patronizing condolence of his look. It is the look of the proud father who raises children guaranteed to fit ready-made clothing.

"Paul," I prompted, with pregnant meaning, "why don't you answer? What do you think of this gentleman?"

"I think, father," he answered, in his dreamy, deliberate tone, addressing me pointedly, but still looking at Griggs, "that he looks like a horse."

I felt as if I were falling from a dizzy height, but the sensation was not altogether painful. Griggs bore up better than I could have hoped, and declared with an attempt at jocularly that he would rather look like a horse than a cow. I had no more presence of mind than to reprove Paul on the spot for his rudeness, a course which could only result in one of two things: a howl or an argument. This time it was an argument; but I could better have stood a howl, for he pointed out that his mother had taught him to always tell the truth, and——

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"That will do, Paul," I interrupted, hurriedly. "Stand up, and I'll introduce you to Mr. Griggs."

I left them to entertain each other, while I escaped into the house for the refreshments. Had I not done so, nothing could have warded off an indignant dissertation from Paul on the difference he was careful to observe between stating actual facts that came under his observation and his habit of making up fictitious persons and events. The latter propensity we never checked, believing that nothing should be said to prevent the fullest development of his wonderful imagination. My own excursions in the realm of undiluted fiction were trifling in comparison to Paul's; before him, doubtless, lay a future with his pen beside which even mine must pale to insignificance.

The room I was in opened upon the veranda. Paul was sitting beside the window, and I could hear his voice distinctly, but only the alternate interrogatory rumble of his companion's. Evidently Griggs was making the most of his opportunity to learn more of my domestic concerns.

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"Oh, he's all right," I heard Paul announce. "He was only playing sick to get out of working. Father said it wasn't worth while to send for the doctor, and we shut him up in the barn so that the others wouldn't take it. We didn't let him out till he said he was quite well thank-you."

"They're all half-brothers and half-sisters. Not of any consequence, you know—just to amuse me."

"Father said he guessed he'd send them to the Orphan's Home; he couldn't afford to feed such a large family. Then he said he'd let me keep them if I made them work hard for their board. I can tell you I keep them going."

"Father says he cares more for me than for the whole crowd, and that he shouldn't be expected to bring up step-children."

"Yes, I let them play for an hour on Saturdays."

"They're all out picking potato bugs except Tom. He's in jail."

"Up in the attic. He stole a candy out of my box, and I locked him up for a week. He gets bread and water only once a day."

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"They each have to bring a full pail of bugs, or else they don't get any tea."

"Father says he'll have Tom put in the Reformatory if I say the word."

What further information Griggs gleaned I had no means of knowing, for Paul was doing so well that I thought it better not to interrupt the conversation, and I took the opportunity of having a brief talk with Andy Taylor before returning to the veranda. Griggs was obviously distraught and had little to say except that he was in a hurry to get back to the city, but he looked at me as if he were mentally formulating charges to lay before the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. He was so engrossed in his thoughts that he neglected to thank me for holding the gate open as he drove through, then I had difficulty in impressing upon his mind what he should say to Harold Jones.

"Tell him," I concluded, holding the horse's head, "that I consider it an impertinence for a mere acquaintance to pry into my private affairs. Is it anyone's business but my own, Mr. Griggs, whether I keep

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only a few fowls or a large assortment of domestic animals? Tell him that I would never dream of asking you how many firkins of butter and crates of eggs you handled in a year, or if your profits exceed the commission you——”

“G’lang there!” shouted Griggs.

V.

PAUL AND THE CHICKENS

“ I HAVE no fancy for the country, as you know, my dear Marion,” wrote Aunt Sophy, in conclusion, “ but your description of Waydean makes me long to accept your invitation. When I heard that Henry had rented a farm I thought you must be simply crazy to let him do it, but your letter has reassured me. Of course, if he has quite determined not to go to any expense in the expectation of making money out of the land, and if you *both* want to live there, it is a different thing. I think it is a splendid idea not to work any more land than he can attend to with a spade, a rake and a hoe. Take my advice, Marion, and keep him to that—no matter what arguments he may use—and you will be perfectly safe. If your poor uncle had only been guided by my advice, or if I had been

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less easily swayed by his hopefulness, I would have had more than a pittance to live on now. But no,—it was buy this, and buy that, till . . .

“How lovely it must be to have your own milk and butter and cream and fruit, and, above all, to know that they’re *clean*! And the chickens! Do you know, I can’t touch chickens in the city; I haven’t tasted one for a year, I am so disgusted at the thought of how they may be fed,—and yet I am just longing for a taste of plump, clean, . . . grain-fed——”

Marion’s voice wavered; she stopped reading. I uttered a prolonged whistle, then laughed in a hollow mirthless tone that brought a responsive gleam to Marion’s worried face. She left the breakfast table and looked anxiously out of the window at the back of the room, then sat down again with a sigh of thankfulness.

“What a mercy Paul wasn’t within hearing,” she said; “how he would have howled!”

I went to the window. Paul was surrounded by our flock of twenty-seven half-

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grown chickens and five hens. In one hand he held his little tin pail of corn; with the other he dealt out one grain at a time to each in turn, calling the fowl by name and reproving those that tried to snatch the others' share. "Jeremiah, here's yours—come along Aunt Noddy," I heard him say coaxingly.

I sat down again and stared at Marion hopelessly; she responded with a gaze of mute despair; then we both studied the tablecloth without speaking, feeling that the skeleton we had ignored for months had at last stalked unbidden from the closet.

As I thought the matter over I could see that Marion was entirely to blame for this hopeless complication. If she had allowed me to get eggs from pure-bred stock for setting we would have had twenty-seven chickens of exactly similar appearance that Paul never could have individualized, never have named, never have loved with the passionate fervor that he bestowed on each one of the variegated specimens hatched from eggs at ten cents a dozen. My eggs, I computed, would have cost not more than five

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dollars; so in order to save four dollars and a half, Marion had saddled us with a flock as unapproachable from a culinary stand-point as so many sacred cows. This conclusion presented itself with such clearness that I was on the point of submitting it to Marion when I remembered how unpleasant it was to me to listen to wholesome truths, so I merely looked unselfish and hummed thoughtfully.

My wife regarded me with suspicion, her frown deepening. "I have asked you repeatedly," she said, with frosty distinctness, "not to hum, and not to look like that."

My complaisance vanished. I am not easily irritated, and I try to avoid answering back, but I cannot stand being told not to look like that.

"Marion," I retorted, "I don't wonder you feel annoyed, but you may as well face the difficulty now. I'm tired of people asking me how we like living in the country, and then remarking that it must be fine to have your own chickens. Of course, I'm willing to keep up appearances and to make-believe that having our own chickens

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is one of our many daily luxuries ; but now that your Aunt Sophy is coming we've got to eat them, or she'll know the reason why. Oh, yes, I know," I added, as she tried to interrupt—"I know we can't have them in the abstract. We've got to kill and cook and pick the bones of Abner, Jeremiah, Lucy, or some other of the boy's pets ; but if I had had my way about the eggs he couldn't have told one from another, and we might have had an occasional fowl without these painful personal associations."

I regretted my rashness when I saw Marion's look of calm scorn, her manner leading me to expect a revival of some of my mistakes. I can evolve plausible theories, but she usually shatters them with the most distracting personal applications.

"I hadn't intended to point out that you are responsible," she said, "but since you are so unjust as to try to blame me, I must do so. Don't you see, Henry, that it is but another instance of your habit of evading unpleasant duties. I have told you repeatedly"—I squirmed in protest, for I do hate that phrase, and I knew so well what

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was coming—"that you would say anything to tide over a disagreeable scene,—and it's true."

"Honestly, Marion," I protested, "I—I wouldn't. I'd jump into any kind of a scrimmage—I'd do anything to please you. If you'll only be cheerful I'll—I'll see that it doesn't happen"—

"There you are again," she interrupted, in a descending cadence of utter dejection. "Oh, dear—it is so hopeless! Listen, Henry, and see if you can understand this: Paul is now six, and yet he never knew there was such a thing as death until last month. You had your way about that—and what was the result? The child nearly went crazy when his bantam hen died. If you had been at home, I have no doubt you would have told him it was asleep, but you more than made up for that by assuring him that it had gone to heaven."

"I did nothing of the kind," I protested indignantly. "Paul came to me"—

"The child came to *me*," Marion went on sternly, "perfectly happy in the thought of Bijou having gone"—

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"He came to *me*," I insisted, "asking if Bijou had gone to heaven. I said I *hoped*"——

"It doesn't matter so much what you said as the way you said it. However, as you say, Aunt Sophy is coming, and we must eat some of those chickens; so *you* may face the situation and settle with Paul. If you had explained to him that chickens were made to eat, as I wanted you to do in the first place, you wouldn't have had this trouble now. If I thought it would be a lesson to you I could stand my share, but I know you'll forget all about it in a week and be ready to do the same thing again, so you may as well take the consequences alone."

I was preparing to ask for a properly executed death-warrant, specifying the first victims by name, but before I could speak my wife dived into her pocket for a handkerchief and retreated upstairs.

I can tackle a disagreeable duty when there is no other course open to me, but I am not upheld, as Marion is, by a strong sense of righteousness; indeed, I am in-

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clined to feel personally unworthy to attempt any good act that is patently out of my line, yet on the rare occasions when Marion behaves in this childish manner I throw my conscientious scruples to the winds in my frantic desire to assuage her grief.

I found Paul teaching a hen and two chickens to sit still as he drew them around on his little wagon. My resolution wavered as I watched his innocent enjoyment, but the thought of Aunt Sophy spurred me on. Besides, if Marion was bloodthirsty enough to want these poor creatures eaten, it was not for me to feel faint-hearted.

"Well, Paul," I said, with spurious cheerfulness, "giving them a ride? Are these some—ha, ha!—you want to keep for pets?"

Paul has a quick ear for a false note. He studied my face with grave wonderment, his earnest gaze piercing my jocose mask. "Why, father," he exclaimed, "your voice sounds so queer—and what a funny ques-

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tion! They're all pets,—of course, I want to keep every one."

"Come and sit on the bench beside me," I said ingratiatingly, "and we'll have a talk. . . . Do you know that—that people sometimes have to—that is, that people don't usually raise chickens for pets?"

"Oh, yes, I know," he replied, nodding his little head with philosophic certainty. "Most boys would rather keep dogs and rabbits, and ponies and other animals; but I don't want anything for pets except hens and chickens, and perhaps—well, I think I would like a pair of white pigeons. I heard you saying to mother that I wasn't a bit like other boys. Is that one way I'm different?"

"It is," I answered with curt emphasis.

Paul snuggled closer to me and leaned his head on my shoulder. "You say that as if"—he hesitated shyly—"as if you wished I was like other boys. Am I not as good?"

"You're better, my boy, far better!" I exclaimed, in quick remorse.

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This remark may appear injudicious, but Paul is like me in many ways, and there is not a shadow of vanity or self-consciousness in his character; no amount of praise, or even flattery, could disturb the natural equipoise of his self-esteem, but he is quick to feel the hurt of unjust depreciation. When Marion forgets my imperfections and tells me I am the best man in the world, I am aware that she is drawing it a little strong; at the same time, I am strengthened and uplifted by her opinion, and I feel the yearning to do noble things, to be more worthy of my pedestal, to attain that serenity of temper which mortals name angelic.

Paul's face brightened, and I knew that I had made amends for my previous abrupt and jarring tone. I began again cautiously, taking care to speak with soothing mellowness. "I don't think I ever heard of anyone keeping twenty-seven chickens and five hens for *pets*."

A merry light danced in Paul's eyes. "That's what you said about farming with a spade, a rake and a hoe," he reminded me, "and mother said we must do what

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was right without thinking about other people."

Chance, instinct, or his inherited nimble mind had enabled him to checkmate me as neatly as Marion could have done it; I moved back. Passing lightly over the objectionable features, I briefly sketched the magnitude of the chicken-raising industry for supplying city markets, pointing out the necessity for poor farmers selling their fowls to buy food and clothing. Despite my care he was visibly shocked.

"No matter how poor *we* were, you would never send *our* chickens to market?" he inquired, breathing hard.

There could be but one answer to that question, and after I had fervently disclaimed the possibility of poverty ever making me so heartless, each of us remained buried in his own thoughts for a brief time. The chickens gathered around, and I fancied they regarded me with intuitive dread in their glistening eyes, as if they waited to hear my next attempt to seal their doom. An overgrown bully suddenly pecked a weaker brother, pulling out a bunch of

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feathers viciously as he spurned the victim with his feet. Paul darted to the rescue and brought the brutal assailant back to the bench a prisoner.

"What is that villain's name, Paul?" I asked with eager interest.

"Why, this is Angelica," he answered. "Don't you remember you named him yourself when he was first hatched?"

I did remember. He was then a beautiful yellowish ball of fluff, with large, soft, wide-open eyes, the prettiest one of the brood; now he was grown into a greedy, swaggering, insolent swashbuckler, proud of his stature and fine plumage.

"He's a dangerous criminal," I said, feeling his plump breast appreciatively, "and it might be better to—to"—somehow the word stuck in my throat; I hesitated.

"I know, father," cried Paul joyfully. "I'm the policeman and you're the judge—he must be tried and then sentenced to wear a muzzle."

Angelica was tried and sentenced, then muzzled with a small rubber band that fitted tightly over his bill. His antics amused

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us so much that for a few minutes I forgot my fatal errand.

"He looks wicked enough to kill some of the others," I remarked, after a pause. "Do you know, Paul, how a person who kills another is punished?" He looked up with sudden, awed interest. "They put a rope around—him, and—and"—

"And *what?*"

"—— fine him a dollar and costs."

"Oh!" he gasped, "I'm so glad that's all. And do they take the rope off afterwards?"

"I believe they do," I replied, in deep dejection.

"Father, I just love chickens. Don't you?"

"I do, indeed," I affirmed, with sudden reckless, despairing intention; "but I love them in two different ways. If they're nice, well-mannered birds I love to see them running about with their feathers *on*; but if they're naughty I love to see them not running about with their feathers *off*." Paul laughed in glee. "Your mother and Aunt Sophy like them too," I went on warily,

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my heart thumping; "and I think if chickens are cruel and bad they deserve to be stuffed"—his expression changed suddenly, but he still looked bravely into my eyes—"with bread-crumbs, and roasted, with thick—brown—rich—gravy."

Paul jerked his little hand from mine and stood up in front of me, his face twitching and his eyes brimming. "You greedy—*greedy*—GREEDY!" he gasped.

"Paul,—my boy,—listen," I implored; "your aunt Sophy is coming, and she's awfully fond"—

My words were lost in a prolonged howl. He had a phenomenal voice, but this delayed howl eclipsed all previous ones. I followed him in frantic haste, eager to forswear all designs on his pets, but he fled as if I were after his scalp. When I finally found him, too late, he was in his mother's arms, and I knew she had promised him everything, from the look she turned on me,—a look that caused me to slink silently away, a soulless brute, and alas!—a tailless one.

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"Henry," said Aunt Sophy, complacently, as I drove her to the station after her visit, "in all the time my husband had his farm I never could get him to use our own chickens. He said they cost him two dollars apiece, being from thoroughbred stock, but I see you have more sense and raise good plain barnyard fowls that you can eat every day if you want to. Why, we must have had them three times a week while I've been here, and you seem to have a good large flock yet. I've tried a dozen times to count them, but they always went criss-cross. How many have you got left?"

"Just twenty-seven," I answered, stroking my mustache with modest pride.

VI

A COW AND A CALF

I DID not approve of Marion's habit of keeping accounts at Waydean. There was always a missing balance, but I never could get her to see what a needless worry and waste of time it was to try to locate it, or how much better it is to take my plan and merely count the cash on hand to settle one's financial standing. It is diverting to me to calculate future hypothetical receipts and expenditures, but it is the reverse of entertaining to look backwards at the irrevocable past, the past that is called back by various carefully entered items in Marion's account book, prominent among which looms payment of three hundred dollars for Emperor mining shares.

It was one evening while I was engaged in preparing my weekly agricultural page for the *Observer*, and Marion was poring over her account book that she suddenly

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dropped her pencil and exclaimed: "Henry!"

"Well?" I asked, with meek resignation, my brain beginning to stiffen, for I judged from her tone that she had arrived at some miraculous result in figures.

"We've been living in the country four months," she said impressively, "and what do you think I find? We've actually paid more for butter and milk and vegetables than in any four months while we lived in the city."

"How strange," I commented, trying to look interested.

My wife smiled slightly, in a way that I find peculiarly irritating. "You're only pretending to listen," she said, "and you couldn't possibly understand while you look like that."

My weariness vanished; I started up indignantly. "While I look like what?" I demanded.

Marion laughed. "That's better," she said. "I'd rather see you look angry than stupid. Now I'll try again to get your attention. Do you remember what you said

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when I gave you the choice of a lawn-mower or a hammock for your birthday? ”

I did remember. I had made a swift calculation at the time that a hammock would be easier to run, so I had urged Marion not to go to the expense of a lawn-mower, reminding her also that it might properly be ranked among the tabooed farm implements.

“Certainly,” I answered, at a loss to know what was coming, “I said I would prefer a hammock.”

“And do you remember that you promised to hire or borrow one of Peter’s cows to crop the grass on the lawn? ”

“Well, I didn’t exactly promise. I said it would be easy enough to get one.”

“And now the grass is as long as hay. Why didn’t you do it? ”

I frowned, for I hate insistent, unnecessary questions,—questions that are bound to lead up to some unpleasant climax that it would be better to avoid. I could stand being thrown overboard without ceremony better than being forced to walk the plank with measured tread, yet if I protest against

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this Socratic method of arriving at conclusions she tells me with pained surprise that it is for my good,—that I should learn not only to regret my mistakes, but to thoroughly understand why I am sorry. Rather than have her say that, I am willing to answer any ordinary question with outward docility.

“The plan didn’t seem so feasible when I thought it over,” I replied meekly. “It would have looked foolish to offer to pay Peter for letting me feed his cow, and I couldn’t make up my mind to borrow one, so the time slipped away before——”

“Of course it did,” she interrupted; “the way it always does. But, after all, I think”—a merry light danced in her eyes—“I’ll forgive you. There’ll be all the more grass for,—oh, dear, you do look so funny!—*our cow*.”

“*Our cow!*” I gasped, in stupefaction.

“Henry,” she burst forth excitedly, “I’ve been trying to break it to you gently, but you don’t seem to understand. I’ve come round to your way of thinking—you may go and buy a cow to-morrow.”

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It was a complete surprise to me that Marion should be so suddenly seized by the desire to own a cow. For my own part I would rather have started with a herd, but still, it was something to be thankful for that she did not insist upon beginning with a goat. Then there was the possibility that a cow might grow into a herd; that would mean a hired man, horses, implements, a large dairy business, more land, an ultimate fortune. Yes, I was more than gratified that Marion was beginning to see that my ideas on farm management were sound.

When I asked our butcher the next morning if he knew of any cows for sale in the neighborhood we awaited his answer with breathless anxiety. He half-closed his eyes, studying the mud on the wagon-wheel in profound meditation, our suspense intensified by this dramatic pause.

"I'll tell you what I'd do," he said, at last, pointing northward impressively with his long knife. "I'd go up there on the clay where the pastures is dried up and the farmers is feedin' hay at fifteen dollars a ton, and I'd buy a cow for half what she could

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be bought for down here where the grass is green."

That sounded reasonable, and when he proceeded to name some of his customers "on the clay," I stopped him at the name Waydean.

"Any relation of Peter's?" I asked, with sudden interest.

"His brother," he answered, with an odd smile—"and it's a dead fright how them two men hate each other! I believe Peter'd go clean off his head if you was to buy a cow from John."

I smiled with satisfaction. Peter had set his snares in vain in many artful endeavors to sell me some of his belongings; with sunny smiles I had avoided giving him a chance to add to the exorbitant rent that I paid him, and he could scarcely conceal glances of sour disappointment in my presence. That I should buy a cow from anyone else would, I knew, be pain to him; his pain would not be less if I bought her from his brother John.

"Well," said the butcher, when I had announced my intention of having a look at

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John Waydean's cattle, "I pass within half a mile of his place on my round, so I can give you a lift if you like to come along with me. Of course," he added, taking a side-long survey of me, "John can't skin a man quite so neat as Peter, but he's pretty sharp on a bargain, and you want to keep your weather eye open when you dicker with him. Know much about cattle?"

Some people can boast about acquirements they haven't got; I cannot. I merely looked shrewd and modest, nodding slightly to the butcher, simultaneously with a faint movement of one eyelid. Marion, misunderstanding my silence, exclaimed confidently: "Oh, he knows *all* about that sort of thing. He writes articles for the *Observer*."

At this point I disclaimed, with becoming embarrassment, all pretension to unusual lore, but the butcher looked profoundly impressed and delighted.

"That's all right!" he said cheerily. "I know his cows is mostly fresh, but he's got one or two strippers."

I went into the house to get ready for

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the trip; Marion followed me. "Henry," she inquired, in a confidential tone, "what *are* fresh cows,—and strippers?"

It was the very problem I was wrestling with. If the butcher had not been waiting, and if Marion hadn't followed me so closely, I would have snatched a moment to consult my books of reference, but I had no time even to collect my thoughts properly. I was in the awkward predicament of the schoolboy who knows he knows the answer to a question, but somehow cannot think of the words. I was in a great hurry, but Marion was so anxious for information that I did my best to enlighten her.

"A fresh cow," I said, struggling into my coat in jerks, "is one—in the prime—of life—and—and vigor; a stripper, on the contrary, is merely—a—a middle-aged—juvenile."

I seized my hat and hurried away. As we drove out of the yard I noticed that Marion was standing in the kitchen doorway gazing after me with the expression of one who is prevented from seeing the bottom of a pool by the reflections on its surface. I

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waved her a gay farewell and hoped for the best.

I had a dim idea that I could find out indirectly during the drive what the butcher thought these terms meant, but I needed all my mental agility to make a creditable appearance of understanding his voluble allusions to grades, stockers, springers, shorthorns, yearlings, heifers, and numerous other varieties of cattle. My answers were brief and guarded, and when I tottered I was so swift to recover my balance that my errors were not apparent to my companion. On such occasions I may sometimes be suspected of not being familiar with a subject, but I would defy anyone to prove my ignorance. If Marion's reputation for veracity had not been at stake I might have been willing to act the part of a humble tyro asking for information, but since she had plainly said that I knew all about cattle it was my duty to try to make her statement appear credible.

I descended from the wagon feeling that I was utterly incapable of choosing a cow, but I concealed my fears under a mask of

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calm assurance as I bade the butcher good-by.

“Mr. Carton,” he said, in parting, “if you was a greenhorn that didn’t know the difference between a stocker and a springer, like most city men, I’d say to buy your cow off of some other man than John Waydean, but he’ll know better than to try to palm off scrub-stock onto you.”

This cheerful prediction almost made me perspire with apprehension, particularly as scrub-stock was a brand new variety that he had not mentioned previously. My confidence returned, however, when I stood in John Waydean’s barnyard and saw his cows paraded for my inspection, for no two of them were alike, and I could tell at a glance which were Jerseys and which were common cows. I took care not to express a preference until I found out which ones their owner appeared most anxious to sell, and these I instantly decided not to buy. Even had I not been warned by the butcher I would have mistrusted John Waydean, for his face had not the prepossessing appearance of his brother’s, and his manner

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was surly and suspicious. I examined each of the animals with a critical air, ignoring his evident desire to make me believe that an ugly creature resembling a bison was the finest cow, and finally chose a graceful, neat-limbed, fawn-colored Jersey. The reluctance to part with her that I detected in the old man's manner, and the fact of his asking me ten dollars more for her than for any other, confirmed my intuition that I had chosen wisely. I was about to close the bargain when the butcher's words came back to my mind. I looked sharply at the seller. His smooth-shaven face was creased with deep lines about the mouth—a mouth resembling his brother Peter's in its smug rigidity, but whether it concealed regret or triumph I could not determine.

“Mr. Waydean,” I said, with stern incisiveness, “is that animal a fresh cow or a stripper?”

His reply had a ring of indignant, scornful reproach. Take her or leave her, he didn't care a blank, but I couldn't run no rig on him by asking such questions. However, since I had mentioned the

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matter, I'd better come into the stable and see the prettiest week-old calf in the county. He'd sell it for two dollars, and if I raised it on that cow's milk he'd be willing to buy it back in the fall for ten. My lingering doubts were dispelled when I saw the pretty little soft-eyed creature, and I suddenly remembered that a fresh cow is one with a fresh calf. Marion hadn't spoken about getting a calf, but I felt sure that if I suggested it should be made into veal she would insist upon its being kept, then I would have a tangible nucleus toward the realization of my dream of owning a herd of dairy cows. I closed the bargain hurriedly, with the proviso that he was to hitch up his team and deliver my purchases at Waydean. In a few minutes the calf was hoisted into the wagon, bleating dismally. I looked for some demonstration of sympathy from its mother, but she appeared quite unconcerned and would not follow until she had been tied to the rear of the vehicle. I thought this rather peculiar, but the old man explained that she had always showed a great fondness for home and was

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reluctant to leave. During our drive he was almost as voluble as the butcher had been, discoursing of the iniquities of the man whom he was ashamed to call his brother. "Mr. Carton," he warned me solemnly, "I wouldn't put it past him to come over and run that cow down, he'll be that mad that you knew too much to buy one off of him, but don't you believe a word he says. A man that'd go into court and swear as he done in connection with my late father's property wouldn't stick at nothin'. You watch Pete; if he ain't took you in on the rent, he'll even up in some other way, for it ain't in him to act straight and square like me."

* * * * *

"The dear little lovely thing! I do believe it's hungry, Henry. How are you going to feed it?"

I have been asked many questions for which I have been obliged to invent answers, but this was not one of them. I had never owned a calf before, so my ideas on calf-raising were logical and con-

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clusive. The theory that the progeny of a cow should not be allowed to associate with the mother was, I explained, founded upon true scientific laws. A calf brought up on a milk-pail would learn to take its food at stated intervals, escape indigestion, heaves and hollow horn, and grow up into a gentle, courteous and productive adult; while the mother, segregated from an otherwise guzzling, irrational, worrying offspring, would chew her cud in the placid beatitude most essential to the production of the largest quantity of rich milk.

Marion listened silently, with a knowing smile, but when I had finished she remarked that I knew perfectly well that I was talking rubbish, and that the natural way of feeding anything was the right way. Hadn't I better get the soup ladle and her mixing-bowl and teach the calf to sit up properly at the kitchen table while I was about it?

I replied rather hastily, and before I had finished speaking Marion left me and went into the house. I was alone with a calf, a cow, and a guilty conscience; alone at the

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very time when I most needed help and encouragement. Five minutes before I had looked on my purchases with exultation, while my wife stood in the stable beside me, uttering ecstatic exclamations of delight because I had bought a cow so beautiful to behold and the dearest little calf that I must never mention in connection with veal again; now, in my black despair over this disagreement, I hated the innocent cause of it. If Marion had tried persuasion, I would have been willing to cast my theory to the winds, but I could not brook ridicule and I determined to bring up that calf by hand at whatever cost in time and trouble. I decided to begin at once by learning to milk the cow; after that, I would be in a better position to look up Marion and forgive her for the way I had behaved.

I didn't expect to become an expert milker at once, but I knew from observation how to milk, and I went to work with frantic energy. In a calmer frame of mind I might have waited to tie Ariadne's legs together, they looked so excessively agile;

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however, she allowed me to exhaust every possible grip and password without protest, also, — alas! — without acknowledgment. When I retreated at last with the empty pail, my dismay was increased by the sideways leaps of joyful anticipation indulged in by the calf in the next stall. Something had to be done to fill up that creature, and I realized with a sense of utter desolation that I was left alone to do it. A word of advice, a protest, tears or angry reprisals, would alike have been sweet to my ears at that moment, but I knew Marion too well to hope that she would come to my help until I implored her forgiveness; even then,—oh, maddening inconsistency!—she would perhaps be plunged in gloom because I had not enough strength of character to stick to my convictions. No, there was but one course for me: I must prove the worth of my theory, if possible; if not, I would at least be in a position to capitulate with the honors of war.

I went into the house and looked up the directions for teaching a calf to drink. I

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found that you merely seized it by the nostrils with the thumb and little finger, inserting the other three into its mouth as you drew its head gently into the pail of milk. This operation sounded rather objectionable, but I could not afford to be squeamish, and I prepared to smuggle our small supply of milk out of the pantry and add it up with water to make a sufficient bulk. As I passed through the kitchen I glanced furtively at Marion in the faint hope that she might be ready to hold out the olive branch, but when I saw that she did not deign to notice my existence a sudden violent resentment seized me. Instead of surreptitiously abstracting the milk, as I had intended, I poured it into the pail with defiant ostentation; still, I left the kitchen with a sinking heart, for when Marion neglected to ask me what I was going to do with that, I knew that she must indeed be in a serious mood.

I know I followed the directions to the letter up to the point when I drew the calf's head into the pail and inserted my fingers, though much perseverance was needed, for

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it seemed to be able to travel backwards in all directions at once, faster than I could go forwards; but after that I am not quite sure what happened. I know there was a violent explosion and upheaval,—a blank followed, then I discovered that I was standing in the stable doorway frantically squeezing three of my fingers between my knees to deaden the pain, while the calf stood outside looking at me with an expression of incredulous wonder, its legs sticking out in four different directions like props. I wonder whether it was blown out or carried out; I don't think it walked. I don't think, either, that I lost my presence of mind; if I did, I found it again instantly. Instead of going into the house for liniment, I calmly turned the cow out of the stable also, then I looked on grimly, resigned to non-interference if the calf should happen to bite its parent or the cow kick her offspring.

Ariadne looked around apprehensively when she emerged from the stable; the calf ambled crookedly toward her; she edged away with forward pointed ears; it fol-

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lowed hungrily. She trotted toward the open gate, the calf gamboling in pursuit; suddenly her tail straightened and she broke into a mad gallop,—so did the calf, so also did I. It was in this order we passed the kitchen door where Marion stood calling out to me in wild alarm to run, that the cow had broken loose.

Perhaps it was this cheery information that inspired me to overtake my movable property a mile further down the road, where our butcher, homeward bound, had got off his wagon to turn them back.

“You might be able to milk a cow that *had* milk,” he said with a chuckle, after listening to my tale, “but it’d take Old Nick to raise a calf on a dry one.”

“A dry one!” I shouted. “Do you mean”——

“Did the old man tell you it was *this* cow’s calf?” he interrupted.

“Well, no,—I can’t remember that he did. He said I’d better take the calf too, and I supposed——”

“Exactly—then he’s salted you right enough! You’ve paid forty dollars for a

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beef cow that he offered to give me for a twenty dollar account he owes me. I'm sorry—dashed sorry—that you've been took in, but—he, he! ha, ha, ha!—but you let on you knowed all about cattle, and I told you to keep your weather eye——”

“I can stand being swindled,” I shouted, in wrath, “but I won't stand any told-you-so business. You ought to have more sense than to talk that way when—when——”

“There, there,” he interjected soothingly—“I know jest how you feel. The other day my missis told me I'd smash my hand if I went hammerin' nails with an axe. Well sir, it wasn't three minutes till I did. Of course I swore a bit, but when I went into the kitchen and the missis asked me first how I done it, and then said she knowed I would, I jest went clean out of my head with rage. I'd sooner have gone out and smashed the other thumb than have been spoke to that way.”

My heart warmed to the butcher; he is a man of fine feelings. He not only gave me twenty dollars for the cow, but promised to frighten John Waydean into silence

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by representing that I was preparing evidence for a criminal prosecution.

"And now," I said, in conclusion, "I'd like your candid opinion about the calf. If I decided to raise it, would it be likely to grow into a valuable cow?"

"Well," he answered, gulping in a peculiar, hesitating way, as if he were reluctant to answer, "you mostly can't tell what kind of a cow a calf will make when it's a week old, but if you—if you wanted to raise a *cow*, you—you——"

His face became suffused with a dull purple flush, as if he were struggling with a mighty spasmodic sneeze; he turned his face away, his body shaking convulsively, then with obvious difficulty he continued: "If you wanted to raise a *cow* you'd ought to have bought a—a—ha, ha, ha!——"

"Have bought *what*?" I cried, in exasperation.

He stopped laughing and looked up and down the road, then leaned over the edge of the wagon-seat with his whip hand shielding one side of his mouth. I hung breathless on his words.

"A—cow—calf," he whispered.

VII

THE ADVENT OF WILLIAM WEDDER

I LIKE to forget unpleasant experiences quickly, particularly mistakes of my own, and to that end I hurried home and told Marion everything. Few husbands, I know, would have done so, but I am not one who lacks the moral courage to do right when I know it will be better for me in the end; nor would I be unwise enough to attempt to conceal the fact that I have faults when I know that it is infinitely wiser to acknowledge them. An error thrust in Marion's way may arouse her compassion, while a good deed, too obviously placed there, may be pushed aside with well-merited contempt. I prefer to let my virtues bloom in seclusion on either side of her path, for her artistic eye delights to spy out the modest flower that hides itself in verdure.

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Marion vibrated between laughter and tears as she listened to my tale. Did I try to extenuate my conduct, or gloss over my unspeakable stupidity? No; I castigated myself unsparingly. I anticipated the worst that might be said, and said it with superlative fervor. Only thus could I hope to avert the useless, humiliating process of having my mistakes pointed out in detail; only thus could I evoke the sweet human sympathy I craved, and divert my wife's indignation toward that adroit old swindler, John Waydean. She was visibly affected by my self-accusation, and I began to breathe more freely. She seemed to be in no haste to interrupt with a word of reproach, or to say that she told me so, or to hope the experience would be a lesson to me. I had begun to reflect that, after all, I wasn't a bad sort of fellow and that man was made to err, when suddenly she burst into tears.

"Marion," I cried, aghast, "I'm an idiot, but there's no use crying over——"

"No," she moaned—"no—use."

"It's *my* fault," I urged, in despair, "but

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if it were yours, I'm—I'm blamed if I'd cry!"

"It *is*—my fault," she gasped, with a fresh relapse.

In a flash I jumped to the conclusion that she was overcome with remorse for having told the butcher that I knew all about cattle. I saw that it really was her fault, after all, but this was not the time to say so.

"Not at all," I assured her, with soothing generosity. "You must not blame yourself—you didn't realize the awkward position you placed me in."

"No — use," she repeated, unheeding. "To think that—I—should be so—taken in!"

"*You* taken in?" I cried. "It was I. Who—what—to—oh——"

The words died away in my throat as Marion uncovered her face. Not a word did she say, but her look was insufferable.

"I didn't," I protested hotly; "I never said I knew all about cattle when"——

I stopped, disconcerted by the expressive interrogatory turn to the corners of

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her mouth. If she had said, in words, that I had convicted myself by my denial, I could have argued the point, but this silent denunciation was distracting. I stared for a moment with uncomprehending hauteur, then strode from the room, trying to make my back view appear like that of a man who might possibly escape being mangled by a train or dying of heart failure until his wife had an opportunity to apologize for her heartless conduct. This device had never failed; it didn't this time. I was reaching for my hat in the hall when Marion called me. I looked back, virtuously impassive, but I could not suppress my joy when I saw in her face, not a sorrowful willingness to forgive me this time, but loving toleration. What mattered forty dollars, or even forty cows, if I might once more be restored to favor?

It was in all sincerity that I assured her that I would profit by my experience, for it did not seem possible that I could ever again meet a cow on terms of mental superiority, and yet, in a few days, time and my elastic temperament had such a mellowing

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influence that I lost all sensitiveness on the subject; indeed, after pledging the butcher to secrecy, I found myself telling Andy Taylor with the gusto of an onlooker. And later, when we had, through the good offices of the butcher, found a suitable cow that wasn't dry, I became able to appreciate the humor of the situation with quite an impersonal relish. Our new cow was not a graceful animal, like Ariadne, but she was easy to milk and docile, and, as Marion said, Paul could never be impaled on her horns, for she hadn't any.

I would not willingly have missed the pleasure of owning a cow, nor the satisfaction of being able to milk her, but I did not try to disguise from Marion the fact that it was hard work; indeed, the harder I work, the more I like her to be aware of it. Solitude is cheering to me, so when, at first, she used to stand beside me and express a fear that I might hurt my back or burst a blood-vessel, I worked enthusiastically; but later, when attending to our cow became a part of the inevitable daily routine, and when I milked in solitude, I got very tired and

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thought morbid thoughts about hired men and other farm accessories that were not.

It is odd that the butcher's aggravating habit of leaving our gate open should have resulted in Marion's suggesting that we should hire William Wedder, the one available man exactly suited to our requirements. Also, I afterwards reminded Marion, if it had not been for what she called my negligence in not removing the gate-semaphore when winter set in, William's observant eye would not have detected anything unusual in the appearance of the place. I recalled, too, that I had several times been prevented from taking down the sign-board by the impossibility of finding the hammer and the wrench at the same time; not only that, but when both tools were to hand I had a strange instinct against making use of them for that purpose. Marion smilingly admitted that it was extraordinary; she suggested that perhaps I was influenced by the same instinct that led me to leave the Venetian shutters on the window frames all winter, instead of taking them off in the fall and

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putting them on again in the spring. However, I was proud enough of the success of my invention to be content to see the obtrusive request "PLEASE CLOSE THIS GATE" swing uselessly in the wintry winds, while the gate itself stood open, half buried in the snowdrift that formed around it after every storm. If the gate were closed, the request retreated into obscurity behind a post, but when it was opened the board swung across the roadway, so that a person driving in or out would have to duck his head to avoid it. The butcher, for whose especial benefit I had taken all this trouble, regarded the device with gloomy suspicion when I showed him how it worked. Instead of admiring my ingenuity, he insinuated that it would be the means of frightening his horses, so I insisted upon his driving in and out several times until they showed complete unconcern. He appeared depressed by the thought that he could never again pretend that he forgot to close the gate, and although I secretly sympathized with him in his repugnance to taking unnecessary trouble, I was de-

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terminated to break him off the habit of leaving the gate open.

Thus it happened that William Wedder, tramping along the road with a red bundle swung over his shoulder, against a blustering March wind, spied something that caused him to stop and think, to lay his stick and bundle in the hollow of a snow-drift, smooth out his face to a becoming gravity, and wend his way up to the house.

It was several hours later in the day when I, returning from the city, halted in the same spot and stared in amazement. The semaphore had vanished, the gate, standing open for months, imbedded in several feet of snow and ice, was now closed, a way being neatly cleared for its movement. I opened it and the warning notice shot out over my head, in perfect working order. I walked up to the house, puzzled but gratified, trying to conjecture how and why Marion had prepared this surprise. She opened the door, struggling to conceal her laughter at my countenance.

“How ever did”—I began.

“Hush! Come into the sitting-room,”

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she said mysteriously. "There's a man in the kitchen!"

"A man!" I exclaimed, in agitation. I had warned Marion never to admit a tramp in my absence, and somehow I leaped to the conclusion that she had been imposed upon by a hardened villain. It was a relief to think she was no longer alone.

She nodded. "Not an ordinary tramp," she said. "He's the dearest, funniest little old man, with pink cheeks like a baby's, and so clean looking. When he'd had his dinner"——

"You gave him his dinner?"

"Certainly I did. You don't suppose I sold it to him? Oh, you needn't look so stern; I'll tell you how it happened. I was just taking my pies out of the oven about eleven o'clock when he knocked at the door and said he'd like to borrow a shovel for a few minutes. About half an hour later I remembered he hadn't brought it back, and when I looked out of the front window there was the top of his head bobbing up and down at the gate. I got on my things in a hurry and went out to see what he was

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doing, and he was scraping the ice so hard with his back turned to me that I had to shout three times before he heard."

" 'What's that for?' I called out. 'For you, ma'am,' he answered, turning round with the oddest look. 'For me?' I said. 'Why, I never asked you to dig out our gate.' 'No, ma'am,' he said, 'but when I seen that there sign hung out, I thought to myself that some widow with small children lived here, and it wouldn't be much of a job to dig out her gate. Then when you come to the door I seen I was mistaken, but I thought I'd do it anyway, for it wasn't your fault that you was so young and—and——' "

I smiled.

"No, I didn't pay him," she protested, the becoming flush on her cheeks deepening. "I offered him a quarter, but he wouldn't take it, so I knew he wasn't trying to flatter me, and I made him come up to the house to get some dinner when he got the gate closed. You should have seen his face when the semaphore went behind the gate-post. He was so delighted that he

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opened and shut the gate several times to see it work, exclaiming, ' My, my! ain't he got a head! Don't that work beautiful! ' "

" I suppose you did right to give the poor old chap some dinner," I observed, with a complacent smile.

" When he came into the kitchen," she continued, " he said the smell of hot raspberry pies was the most appetizing smell in the whole world. He said his aunt used to make them when he was a boy, and once he stole a whole one and ate it, and ever since when he tries to feel sorry the remembrance of the delightful sensation in his insides overpowers his conscience and makes him feel glad. Of course I gave him one for dinner, and I told him he might have another if he wished, but he declared that one was enough—that no mortal could stand more than a certain amount of bliss. Just fancy, Henry; he says his aunt's pies weren't a circumstance to mine! "

" The old flatterer! " I exclaimed.

" You didn't say that when he praised your semaphore," cried Marion, with resentment.

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I hadn't intended any reflection on the quality of her pies, but it was some little time before she could understand that I really thought them to be infinitely superior to my mother's.

"After dinner," she went on, "he said he wasn't in a hurry, so he'd just cut up some wood and do the stable work until you came home, for he wanted to see you."

My curiosity was aroused, also my suspicions, for my wife's manner was distinctly ingratiating. That might mean either that she had some new project of her own in the background to submit to me, or that she was about to tack off in another direction in regard to one of mine, as she had done in the case of the cow.

"About my semaphore?" I inquired warily.

"So he said," she replied, with a tantalizing laugh. "He wants to—to—handle the county right!"

My heart thumped; my brain seemed to turn a somersault. If Marion had not been swaying to and fro with her handker-

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chief covering her face as she struggled with her mirth I could not have concealed my exultation. Months before, the success of my device had led me to think of having it patented under the name of "The Eureka Non-Automatic Gate-Closing Attachment," but Marion had nipped my project in the bud. The butcher, too, when I asked his opinion, had chilled my enthusiasm by declaring that if my gate-attachment proved salable in this locality he would move to some other. Of course, that was before he had become expert in keeping his head out of the way of the sign-board, and while he still wore a strip of court plaster on the bridge of his nose.

Now my judgment was vindicated. A man could surely sell one hundred semaphores at five dollars each in one county; ten counties would enable me to buy Way-dean; ten more would pay for a train load of implements, as in my day dream of long ago; another ten would stock the farm with domestic animals; tens of hundreds of counties still remained to furnish the means for nebulous philanthropic schemes.

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Did I breathe hard, grow flushed or pale with excitement, or do anything to indicate that it was the moment of my triumph? No, I didn't. For one thing, I was sure Marion was keeping something from me; otherwise, why should it seem so funny to her? Until I understood what she meant, I must appear calm, even bored.

"Well," I said, stifling a yawn, "I'll go and send him off. I wouldn't be bothered selling county rights; besides, the semaphore isn't patented."

Marion looked puzzled. "Wait," she said hurriedly, "till I tell——"

"I'll get rid of him first," I said, with determination, "and then you can tell me the rest."

"But he's not to be sent off," she insisted. "Sit down, and I'll tell you everything. He's looking for a place."

"A place!" I exclaimed, beginning to see light. "What has that got to do with us? When I proposed hiring a man you said we couldn't afford to hire more than a quarter or an eighth of a man."

"Exactly. And this old man wants a

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place where he need work only two or three hours a day. He won't take any wages, but he'd like to have the reading of our books and newspapers. He says he hasn't any use for money as long as he has 'good readin' and nice vittles.' "

I smiled at the persuasive eagerness of her tone. She was evidently bent upon hiring this peculiar old man, but she had expected me to make the proposal so that she could gracefully accede to it. There would be certain advantages, I concluded, accruing to the possession of even the fractional part of a hired man. For instance, I would at once be relieved of the stable work and the milking of Mary Jane. Then spring was coming on, and I would be able to enjoy the luxury of watching him toiling in the vegetable garden under Marion's supervision. Furthermore, my birthday would arrive with the first green grass, and there were indications that I would be presented with a lawn-mower.

"Well, what did you tell him?" I asked, trying to look judicial.

"I said that of course it was a matter for

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you to decide and I couldn't say anything about it."

I could not repress a gleam of ironical amusement. She was absolutely truthful, yet it was a convention of hers that my word was law, and that I was the autocrat of the household. It was a postulate I dared not dispute.

"Yes, of course," I admitted, in response to her frigid, inquiring glance. "I'll—I'll think it over. In the meantime I'll have a look at him."

"Well, you'd better decide,—that is, I'm quite, quite willing to give the poor old man a trial."

Had I been of a different mind from Marion, I could scarcely have resisted William Wedder's persuasive arguments, and when I had talked with him for a few minutes I did not wonder that she had succumbed to his fascinating eloquence. I knew his praise of my semaphore must be flattery, and yet—I liked it. I felt sure from his manner, his appearance and his conversation that he was merely masquerading as a hired man, but I wanted to see him play

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the part, although he looked more like a well-to-do retired farmer taking a holiday than a man who needed to travel about looking for work. He did not present credentials, but I ignored the question of references, which seemed quite unnecessary in view of his obvious respectability. He knew how to do farm work, he assured me; he was handy with tools, understood gardening, and could churn and make butter as well as milk the cow. As to terms, he would not take money, but he would be more than satisfied if he had his board and plenty of reading matter. In the slack time in midsummer,—his smooth-shaven jolly face grew solemn as he spoke,—perhaps, if it wouldn't be too much to ask, and if he needed a new suit of clothes, I might let him have just a township right to sell my gate-closer.

I fixed my curious gaze upon his rigid features. I knew instinctively that his earnest solemnity was assumed; I knew by experience that nothing was so effective in baffling any attempt to play off as a steady concentrated stare. His eyes drooped

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slightly ; he studied the names on the drawers of the spice-cabinet attentively ; too attentively.

“ William,” I said, with deliberate, unbending determination, “ I have avoided asking you embarrassing questions, but I must know the truth about this semaphore business before I decide whether to engage you or not. What prompted you to dig out my gate? ”

I saw a faint flicker of almost contemptuous amusement in his face. “ Why,” he replied, as if he wondered at my asking such a simple question, “ I seen that there notice up, of course.”

“ I want to know the truth,” I repeated slowly, and this time I was almost startled by the perfection with which I imitated Marion’s inflexible intonation.

His face assumed a pained and yet forgiving expression, and he regarded the hair broom with intense interest. I waited, as Marion had once waited for me, with the air of being willing to wait until he had time to compute the number of hairs it contained, and I tried to intimate silently

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that my waiting could have but one result. This specialty of Marion's was more difficult, but I succeeded, for William suddenly laughed and looked me full in the face with engaging candor.

"Well, sir," he said, as if he found a difficulty in making the confession, "I didn't like to say so at first, but I thought—ha, ha!—it'd be a darn good joke on you."

I smiled appreciatively. William had done well; indeed I could not have done better myself, but I recognized a hollowness in his laugh. I waited with silent expectancy, as one of Paul's chickens might wait after receiving a grain of corn from his store.

He paused, looked a little blank, gulped, then with the air of one who reluctantly parts with his last coin, he added: "Besides, I wanted to see how the semaphore worked."

I shook my head, sighed, looked at him pityingly, for I saw the misguided man had persuaded himself it was the truth, and I divined, I know not how, that he was mistaken. I tried to recall what Marion would

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have said at this juncture, and I said it; indeed, I said it so effectively that I wished Marion had been within earshot. If my voice had not been an octave lower than hers I might have doubted that it was mine.

William's peach-tinted cheeks flushed crimson; he wiped his brow with his red bandanna. "I ain't been cornered like this," he exclaimed, "since my miss—" He checked the utterance with an abrupt cough, and continued in a low soliloquizing tone, "Now I come to think of it, the wind was blowin' pretty fresh and jest when I come opposite the gate I caught a whiff that set me thinkin'."

"A whiff?" I asked, in surprise.

"Hot—raspberry—pies," he explained, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

I was completely satisfied and engaged him on the spot, sending him to milk at once. He had scarcely departed when the door into the dining-room opened and Marion appeared. I saw from her face that she had been listening to the conversation, and that indignation and amusement struggled for mastery.

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"You wr-r-etch!" she ejaculated.

I said nothing. I was master of the situation, and I knew it was one of the times when she could imagine more provoking insinuations than I could put into words.

"What are you laughing at?" she cried indignantly.

"I was just thinking—" I began, then I paused dramatically.

"Thinking what?" she demanded.

"That William Wedder is either a married man or a widower."

I had intended her to ask me why, and I had the answer ready, but it was the wrong question she propounded.

"A married man *or* a widower?" she repeated slowly; then her face became suddenly illumined with appreciative mirth. "Oh, I see! Because it was so hard to get at the *exact* truth?"

"Ye—es," I faltered.

VIII

MARION RISES TO THE OCCASION

WILLIAM WEDDER, as one-fourth of a hired man, was a distinct success. Not only did he do the ordinary chores that had previously fallen to my lot, but he lightened Marion's household labors by his readiness to churn, wash floors and windows, and to do any other extra work that might have turned her attention from culinary duties. In fact, it soon became apparent that the mainspring of William's energy needed to be kept in working order by a diet that included a liberal supply of raspberry pie or its equivalent, for if the quality or quantity of the dessert were not to his liking his movements became languid and his cheerfulness fled. His own theory, he told me in confidence, was that the desert compartment of his stomach was so arranged that no amount of plain food would fill it,—he was quite sure that was

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the case, for the only effect of trying to fill up by substituting plain food for puddings and pies was to make him feel lop-sided.

But if he was costly to feed he paid for his board by the bountiful supply of vegetables he raised, for our little garden flourished amazingly under his care. And if we fancied chickens for dinner, it was no longer necessary for me to steal out with the axe at night after Paul was asleep and rouse a horrid clamor among the innocent victims that I tremblingly clutched by the legs. How William did it we never inquired. Indeed, we preferred to think that he didn't, but if he did, it was done in silence and with decorum, and the chickens which I had taken the precaution not to allow Paul to include in his flock appeared on our kitchen table looking quite as if they had just been bought at the market.

It was during the second summer at Waydean that I noticed the first indication of Marion's longing to own the farm. She began to resent the proximity of Peter's live-stock, when his cattle looked as if they thought of leaping the fence, or when his

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pigs strayed into the barnyard. Then she began to speculate about the value of the land and how many years it would take us to save enough money to buy it, and if, after all, it would not have been better to have leased the whole farm in the first place, so that we might have had employment for the whole of a hired man. Later, she insinuated that she would feel more confidence in me if I had shown myself to be a masterful man by insisting upon the purchase of a plough to add to our three primitive implements, and when I contended that a plough would have been useless without a horse, she declared that a horse would have been provided if we had needed one, and if we made up our minds to buy the place we would find a means of raising the money. But in this case I was not as sanguine as Marion, for I knew that Peter would hold out for a price far in excess of the value of the property if he knew we thought of buying, and that my present income would only allow us to put away a small sum each year toward the purchase. However, the idea kept working in my mind, though I was

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careful not to let our landlord know that we coveted his land, concluding that the best way to deal with him, if we ever were able to buy it, would be through a land agent. In the meantime, I had considerable difficulty in keeping the peace between him and my hired man, for they showed such an antipathy to each other that I feared a dispute would arise that might endanger the renewal of my lease. We had all become so fond of the place that I was more than willing to go on paying a high rent, and Peter himself, besides being interesting and entertaining, was still a precious mine of literary material.

Aunt Sophy's interest in Waydean almost equalled our own, and she was enthusiastic in her approbation of our idea of buying the property. She wrote that had I resembled her late husband in temperament she would have advised Marion differently, but considering the wonderful talent I had shown for not buying implements, and my sensible ideas about poultry-raising, she was sure I could be trusted to manage any amount of land economically.

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Poor Aunt Sophy! She had been ill during the spring, and had delayed her second visit until she would feel stronger; then a few days before we expected her she telegraphed that she would be unable to leave home and asked Marion to go to her at once, if possible. When this direful message arrived we both felt at the same instant that it meant the end of dear Aunt Sophy. But in addition to the sorrow that welled up in me, the appalling thought seized me that it was now too late to atone for having allowed her to cherish the innocent belief that the fowls she had helped us to eat were of our own raising. I could no longer hope that the memory of the vicarious chickens of last summer would be eclipsed by her enjoyment of the real home-made ones we had meant to lavish on her this year. Up to this time the fact that Marion had been equally guilty with me, had been consoling, but when I saw by the agonized look on her face that the same dreadful thought had gripped her I hastened to take the blame.

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"It was my fault, Marion," I gasped penitently. "I bought the chi—chick——"

"*Don't!*" she cried, with a little shriek. "How can you say that dreadful word? Of course, it was your fault,—but will that keep Auntie from dying while she still thinks that—that—oh, oh!"

I must say I had not expected such ingratitude. Considering my generous assumption of the blame, Marion might at least have said that it wasn't my fault. Some people can perform a kindly act, and then pass on their way serenely; I cannot. I want to stand by and enjoy the effect; I like my beneficence to be appreciated.

Yet unselfishness, unlike affection, may be wasted; worse, if ignored, it may arouse a whirlwind of passion, as I found, to Marion's cost. In a most unbridled manner I disclaimed responsibility. I asserted that Aunt Sophy, if she were dying, would pass away more peacefully if she went on believing that the chickens were home-grown; that anyway, not having spared expense, I had procured plumper and jucier ones than the best of Paul's; that any per-

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son who would think of disturbing, at such a time, the settled convictions of a dying aunt, was heartless and cruel ; that I did not purpose standing quietly by to have my reputation blasted, when I merely needed to tap my head and whisper to Aunt Sophy that my wife's delusion was a harmless one that might well be ignored ; finally, that a dying aunt would have something else to think about than the origin of the chickens she had eaten last year. I even suggested, with insane hilarity, that she would be absorbed in speculations as to her chances of reaching Uncle Philip before he had begun to underdrain his celestial estate.

It was at this point that I came to my senses. Marion had fled from the room with her hands over her ears.

There are times when a simple acknowledgment of wrong-doing, or a humble apology, is sufficient ; there are other times when it is expedient for me to confess my utter inability to understand how I could have behaved in such a base and brutal manner ; but only once in years am I obliged to collapse dejectedly, my face ex-

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pressing horror and revulsion as I wipe cold sweat, imaginary or real, from my brow, while in a broken voice I insist that *I* didn't,—that if I seemed to, it was the devil who had suddenly possessed me.

This time Marion was disinclined to accept any such explanation, contending that if I allowed myself to become possessed I might take the consequences, and I had such a short time in which to depict the extraordinary sensations that accompanied the outbreak that she was ready to start for the train before I had made my case really convincing. She relented sufficiently, however, on the score of parting, to forgive me provisionally, but she hinted that she was taking Paul with her so that if I had another seizure I might enjoy it alone. She hoped, also, that I would make a strong effort to avoid being seized in the presence of strangers who might not understand that I was irresponsible. Did I think she could trust me to behave with decorum if I should be sent for to attend poor Auntie's—obsequies?

These, and other insinuations, I bore with

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patient quiet dignity, as became a man who had been lately dispossessed, and my demeanor had such an effect upon Marion that she bade me good-by with the same affectionate warmth that would have fallen to my lot had I behaved with my customary courtesy.

It was not until the next day that I began to think that we might have been too hasty in concluding that Aunt Sophy was seriously ill—although I could think of no other reason for her sudden change of plans and her summons to Marion, but I was not left long in doubt. That afternoon a telegram arrived from Marion assuring me that there was no cause for alarm and that she would be home the next day.

I awaited her arrival with eager curiosity and impatience, and I was mystified to see her step off the train looking radiantly happy.

Aunt Sophy, she declared, was never better in her life, and looked ten years younger, but no further information could I extract until we reached the house and Paul went off to look after his pets. Then I in-

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quired anxiously if she had confessed about the chickens.

"N—no," she admitted, with smiling hesitancy, "I—I didn't. Auntie's mind was so taken up with—other things."

This was agreeable news. The idea of Aunt Sophy learning of my duplicity had been painful, when I had supposed she was dying; the image of her in good health and looking ten years younger as she listened to my shortcomings was intolerable. Besides, in weakening on her determination to confess, Marion had departed from the line of strict moral rectitude that she was continually tracing for my uncertain footsteps. This thought I carefully buried, like a dog with a precious bone, to be unearthed when next I was hauled over the coals for not doing the thing I ought to have done.

"Well," I proceeded, "what's up—what did she want you for?"

A slightly apprehensive look vanished; a most becoming flush spread over her face. For a moment I imagined, if such a thing were possible, that she radiated with pride and vain-glory.

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"She wanted—to ask—my advice," she replied, with innocent diffidence.

"Your advice!" I shouted, with a burst of laughter. "Christopher Colum— Oh! —I—I beg your pardon, Marion, I didn't mean——"

I was too late. I am a blundering idiot at times, and my wife thought, naturally, that I was scoffing at the idea of her being qualified to give advice, when, as a matter of fact, I considered her an adept in that accomplishment. I had the painful task of explaining in detail why I had laughed, and the humiliation of admitting that, after all, it wasn't a bit odd for an old lady to crave advice from her niece.

"Anyway," Marion contended, with recurring indignation, "she isn't really old—she's only fifty-three."

"Is that all?" I inquired, with excessive surprise. "Why, she's—she's just in her prime!"

"Just what I told her!" exclaimed Marion, with approving enthusiasm. "I said she had half a lifetime before her yet."

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"Certainly, she has," I agreed. "And what did she want your advice about?"

A look of ineffable sweetness, of tender, grand-maternal pride illumined Marion's countenance. I had never seen its like before, but somehow I recognized a spiritual inner consciousness made visible; an intangible something that a man of less refined and delicate perceptions would have missed. I didn't know what it meant. I do now.

"Dear Aunt Sophy," she murmured dreamily, her eyes brimming, her gaze directed through and far beyond me, in a way that made me feel transparent; "she was so happy when I settled it!"

This remark conveyed no meaning to my mind, yet something within me vibrated in sympathy to her mood, so that for a short time I sat spellbound, caring only to enjoy the subtle delight of feeling what I didn't comprehend. I remembered, years before, in a lecture on mental phenomena, hearing the difference between perception and apperception explained so minutely that my brain swiftly convoluted whenever I tried to

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recall the distinction; now it was clear. Marion and Aunt Sophy had apperceived together—I was apperceiving. There was an inner circle, and I was of it; yet in the midst of my enjoyment my material mind somehow detached itself, reaching out longingly for more.

“You settled it?” I suggested, in a reverent whisper.

“I did,” she replied softly.

My mind was a yawning void, except for the intrusive suggestion of coffee, plainly absurd, yet some instinct warned me to avoid abruptness.

“Was she willing to—to—?” I ventured.

“Willing!—*willing!*—I should think so. But I know exactly how she felt. Her mind was really made up, I think, though she didn’t know it. I could see that although she *thought* she wanted my advice she would have been heartbroken if I had advised her *not* to do it, and I knew that what she needed was my encouragement, so—I—I——”

“You encouraged her,” I cried, with sudden inspiration.

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"Why, of course I did. She was so grateful that she just threw her arms about me and—" Marion choked with emotion and stopped to wipe away her joyful tears.

I began to feel distracted, but with an effort I focussed my mind on the main point, setting aside as unimportant a doubt as to what Aunt Sophy had done or said after she had embraced her niece.

"What disturbed her mind before you settled it?" I asked.

"She was afraid that I—that people might think her old and foolish."

"And you made her believe that she was—I mean, wasn't?"

"Yes, and I told her that you had often said that people ought to consider it a duty to—to live so that—that they would enjoy the companionship of suitable companions when—they got up in years, and that an elderly person living around among relatives was to be pitied."

It was a garbled version of an argument I had used during a previous discussion on the propriety of second marriages. I had contended, with personal indifference, that

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to an impersonal entity, left alone in this vale of tears with no embarrassing family ties, and feeling no dread of complications in a future state of existence, a second marriage might prove both expedient and happy. This suggestion I had offered in entire innocence, as I might have distended a paper bag for a child to burst, fancying it would please Marion, as it usually did, to worry a weak argument to tatters ; an operation which I enjoyed for the sake of seeing her eyes flash and the becoming color that mounted to her cheeks. But when, amid a torrent of tears, she accused me of being just like other men, and of planning to marry another wife, I was struck dumb with horror. It was painful enough to be brought face to face with the thought of her dying first, but to be branded as a probably faithless wretch was agony. I can try to justify myself for wrong-doing ; I can resent the injustice of being blamed for actions that I refrain from ; but when I suffer for deeds that I wouldn't do in the distant future I am staggered by improbable possibilities. Given the opportunity,

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might I not have caused the death of my great-great-grandfather? Consequently, I remained silent, guiltily silent, in appearance; and Marion no longer condemned second marriages—at least, she hadn't for some months—as a disgrace to civilization, her manner indicating sorrowful resignation to the inevitable.

It is strange, but true, that I didn't know what was coming; and yet I thought I knew, too well. My wife had apparently told her aunt of my supposititious inclinations; they had wept in each other's arms; they had apperceived together; awful thought, they had apperceived ME.

Never before had I been so moved. I rose to my feet, my teeth tightly clenched, vaguely pleased to notice that I stood unsteadily; it was the proper, the most effective way. "Marion," I said, in an undertone, gripping her arm, yet careful to press only hard enough for a grip—she was such a tender little thing, though so cruel. I had intended to say more, but the one word seemed so full of meaning that I stopped to let it penetrate; also to give one swift

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glance at the reflection of my face in the mirror of the wall-cabinet. That glance showed me that I appeared to be struggling with the unutterable; I went on doing so.

Marion's face grew pale and rigid. "Good gracious, Henry!" she cried, trying to rise; "what's the matter?"

"Sit still," I commanded fiercely, with a bitter smile; a smile that made my teeth gleam back at me wolfishly from the wall-cabinet. "Matter enough! You've wrecked my happiness by telling Aunt Sophy that I wanted another wife."

"I never did!" she cried indignantly. "Do you think I could bear to tell *anyone* if—if it was true?"

My grasp relaxed. I knew there must be something wrong in my reasoning. "Do you mean," I asked cautiously, "that you couldn't have told her because it wasn't true—or—or because it was?"

"I couldn't tell her *anyway*," she cried, with a peal of laughter, covering her face with her hands. "Oh, how funny!"

I sat down, feeling strangely flabby and weak. "Then why," I asked helplessly,

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mopping my brow, "did you repeat what I said about second marriages?"

Her smile gave place to a look of anxiety. "Listen, Henry," she entreated, "and try to fix your mind on this. I explained to you that your opinion was the greatest comfort to her, and I told her what you thought because I wanted—to—settle—her—mind."

"Oh, yes—just so," I assented. "And it got that way because she was old and foolish." I nodded with a vacuous air of perfect understanding.

Marion leaned back on the sofa limply and stared at me. "Not because she was old and foolish, for she wasn't," she said helplessly, "but because she thought other people would *think* she was."

"Yes, yes," I repeated vacantly; "then you came along and straightened things out. Now," I added, "you may try your hand on me. My mind's unsettled."

I felt a foolish smile widening my mouth at Marion's look of alarm, and closed my eyes trustfully as my head drooped backwards. When I opened them again she

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was standing behind my chair shaking me with all her might. A fog seemed to drift away from my brain and I suddenly knew what I wanted to ask. "What—advice—did you—give?" I asked, in spasms.

"To marry—Mr. Fair——"

"*Marry!*" I shouted, leaping to my feet. "Old Fairman?"

Her eyes shone with triumph. "*Mr. Fairman, Henry,*" she said, in gentle reproof. "Auntie left all the arrangements to me, and she was delighted at the idea of being married here at the end of her visit. I knew you would be glad to do anything you could."

"But where do I come in?" I asked, in bewilderment.

"Oh, well, I don't exactly know yet, but I might want you to give her away if we decide to have anyone do that, and there are lots of things you can attend to."

I smiled a smile that I keep for particular occasions. At times I can be decided; Marion says obstinate. But whether it is obstinacy or decision, I am as unyielding as a mule when the fit seizes me. I care not

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for reason, threats or chastisement; hope, fear, love and all else are encased in the one instinct to stand rigid, with my ears flat against my head and my fore-feet projecting slightly. Marion has learned that the only remedy is to pat me around the nose and put a lump of sugar in my mouth. So have I.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," I said, with a quick sideways jerk of my head.

Marion swallowed twice before she spoke. "Henry, dear," she said, sweetly, "I know you must have a good reason for your decision. Tell me what it is, won't you?"

I hadn't, but when a man is spoken to that way he's got to take notice, or feel like a boor. "It would take too long," I replied stubbornly, thinking hard.

"Oh, no, it wouldn't. Come and sit on the sofa and tell me all about it. It's awfully good of you to take so much interest in *my* aunt."

I sat down stiffly on the edge of the sofa, and stared into futurity; Marion toyed with my hair and looked inquiring.

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"You ask me to give away your aunt," I began, in stern accusation, "to a man of whom I know literally nothing. I remember him only as a well-dressed, respectable-looking old codger, wearing gold-rimmed glasses, a stubby grey beard and no mustache. He may be virtuous; he may not. He may be in love with your aunt; he may be in love with her money."

Marion rested her cheek against my unyielding shoulder and reassured me on every point in the gentlest, most affectionate manner, though, she knew I would be relieved to hear, I was under no responsibility in the matter. Anyway, it was only a form, and if I objected to doing it, Auntie could give herself away or send to Colorado for Uncle Richard. "Is that all?" she concluded.

It wasn't. I wanted to know what had become of the first Mrs. Fairman. After that, there was one thing more that it took much coaxing to extract.

"It doesn't seem fair," I burst forth, at last. "*He* can't stop it, and they don't even consider whether he'd give his con-

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sent, if he had a chance." Marion stared at me stupidly, and I saw that she didn't understand. "Your Uncle Philip," I explained, in a low tone.

I do not care to repeat what she said. At the same time, I cannot see that such a thought is more irreverent than the fact that suggested it. Nor could I see that I should withdraw my objection because, as Marion averred, Uncle Philip would have remarried in a year if Aunt Sophy had died first. Indeed, I was unrelenting until we came to a complete understanding on the whole subject, as follows:—

(a) Second marriages, in the abstract, are objectionable.

(b) Second marriages are, occasionally, justifiable.

(c) *Some* are INCONCEIVABLE.

IX

AUNT SOPHY'S GENEROSITY

I HAVE often wondered how my wife's Aunt Sophy came to be so fond of me from the very beginning of our acquaintance. Up to the time that she visited us at Waydean we had met only casually, yet at the end of that short visit we parted the warmest friends ; indeed, she embraced me with motherly affection and implored me to take good care of myself and not work too hard. What, she suggested with tender solicitude, would Marion and dear little Paul do without me if I shortened my life by overwork? I was deeply affected by her thoughtfulness ; my eyes glistened with emotion as I promised to be careful, for the mental picture of my family sorrowing over my worn-out frame made me realize what a loss I would be. But whatever her good opinion was based upon, force of circum-

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stances tended to confirm it, for she found many details of our domestic economies that coincided with her ideas of good management, and never failed to attribute to me more than my proper share of credit for the same. It was impossible for me to advance an opinion on any subject without her enthusiastic approval, but whether she approved of the ideas because they were mine, or liked me because of them, I could not determine. Another thing that made her visit enjoyable was Marion's flattering desire to show me up in the best possible light. I was surprised to find that I could work through my repertory of entertaining stories, and yet have my wife join in Aunt Sophy's appreciative laugh with the zest of a first hearing; and whenever Aunt Sophy nodded to her in confidential admiration of my cleverness she would respond with a most charming flush of gratified pride. Not only that, but I have heard her, on occasions when I was supposed to be absorbed in my writing in the next room, allude to my admirable qualities in an artfully casual way; even stating, when the con-

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versation turned on mining stocks, that she was thankful to say that Henry couldn't be induced to put a dollar into any such scheme!

But nothing I had said or done impressed 'Aunt Sophy as favorably as Marion's version of my opinion on second marriages. During the two months she spent with us at Waydean before her marriage I was often embarrassed by her expressions of gratitude to me for being instrumental in helping her to make up her mind. No one, she said repeatedly, had made her see her duty as clearly as I, and no one else could have said the same things (at this point she always paused to take off her glasses and wipe her eyes) in such beautiful and sympathetic language; young people so often thought that older persons had no right to marry. Nor could I disclaim the sentiments attributed to me when I saw what a comfort they were to the dear old lady.

She was very happy in her preparations, but to me there was something pathetic in her happiness, for I could not help thinking of poor Uncle Philip and wondering if she

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did too, but as far as I could find out I was the only person in the house who became a prey to saddening reflections. This perplexed me to such an extent that sometimes I was distracted by the fear that I, too, might be forgotten—a maddening conclusion, but logically unassailable. At such times I would hesitatingly ask Marion if she were sure Uncle Philip was forgotten, but she would only reply, “Tut!” or “Stop that!” in a vicious suppressed whisper. This was unsatisfying, but of course Marion did not understand my need of sympathy, and her mind was not in a favorable condition to consider questions relating to psychical research. I had seen her with Mrs. Taylor in the height of her rag-carpetting fever, but her delight in that was slight compared with the bliss of helping to plan Aunt Sophy's trousseau, and I soon realized that it was not a time when she would be likely to concern herself about either my present or future state.

But after the anniversary of our wedding day I determined that, as far as I was concerned, Uncle Philip might remain buried

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in oblivion; if he intruded himself into my thoughts I drove him forth again with contumely. Only thus could I preserve my self-respect, and at the same time feel that I was at all worthy to partake of the full measure of Aunt Sophy's generous affection. The feeling of sympathy that I had cherished for her deceased husband, and the half-reproachful tolerance of her projected second marriage, suddenly left me, and I not only transferred my sympathy to Mr. Fairman, but I began to hate the memory of Uncle Philip. I might not have gone as far as that if he had not persisted in haunting me after it had become impossible to harbor him without being disloyal to Aunt Sophy, but my conscience became clear when my change of sentiment could no longer be doubted. Had I still felt any mental reservation I could not have accepted her more than generous gift of a cheque for five thousand dollars which she insisted upon giving to each of us on the morning of our wedding anniversary, nor could we have refused without hurting her feelings.

"If you say another word," she declared,

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in response to our protests, "I'll be offended. It's a queer thing, indeed, if I'm not to be allowed to do what I like with my own money! You both know perfectly well that my future is provided for, and I'd rather have the pleasure of seeing you spend it now than put it away for you until after I'm gone, when you mightn't need it so much. You don't need it now? Of course not. Well then, you, Henry, if you can't think of anything else, might spend yours at the races; Marion can give a real nice ball with hers, if she wants to. Remember, I'd like each of you to spend your money without consulting the other, so that you'll feel perfectly free to use it in any way. Put it away for Paul? Not a bit of it. *I'll* provide for Paul—the dear little old-fashioned pet! Do you know, he came to me yesterday with that solemn expression of his, and said, 'Auntie, I love you far more than if father had killed all my chickens for you to——' "

"Oh, Auntie," interrupted Marion, with forced gayety, "I've intended for ever so long to tell you about——"

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I cannot bear anyone else to confess my sins, and just as the rapidly ascending pitch of Marion's voice indicated the approach of the climax I recovered my presence of mind and drowned her announcement with a loud laugh. "Awfully good joke!" I exclaimed. "Last year Paul raised such a hullabaloo about eating his that I—ha, ha, ha!—had to buy all we used. at the market!"

I had expected her to be astonished, perhaps shocked; evidently she wasn't. My laugh stopped short as I saw her nod in knowing assent and smile complacently.

"Auntie," cried Marion—"you knew!"

"Well," she admitted, "I won't say I *knew* exactly, but I'll tell you how it happened. Perhaps you remember my saying last summer that Henry sometimes reminded me of your Uncle Philip?"

"Yes, you often said that he had uncle's smile and tone of voice."

"And then," she continued, "I noticed that it was always when I spoke about the chickens being so nice that I saw the resemblance, and I remembered that Philip, when he raised fancy fowls, used to bring

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me chickens every time he came from the farm, and I never suspected that he bought them at the market until one day we had a pair for dinner that couldn't have been less than ten years old."

"I—thought it—would spoil—your appetite if you knew," I began penitently.

Aunt Sophy laughed, then sobered again in tender reminiscence. "Just what poor Philip said," she mused, shaking her head. "He was a good judge of meat and poultry, but he didn't do as well as you, Henry. There isn't one man in a thousand who could choose as many tender chickens without being taken in. I never would have guessed they were bought ones if you hadn't come home one day with a pair of legs sticking out of the parcel under your arm. It was so good of you, Henry, to take all that trouble to spare that little darling's feelings. Not many fathers would have been so unselfish and considerate."

I said nothing. I can endure being admired for my virtues, but Aunt Sophy's commendation made me dumb with excess of emotion and joyous surprise. I had

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thought myself a pretty good sort of fellow, but the revelation of how much better I really was than I had seemed began to visibly affect me. I became so agitated that I could feel my nose beginning to twitch like a rabbit's. Marion and Aunt Sophy also looked hysterically inclined to fall into each other's arms in an ecstasy of forgiveness, so I hastily retreated to my study. There was a stovepipe hole in the partition between the two rooms through which detached and semi-detached words were wafted to my ears. Some people would have been self-conscious enough to move out of hearing or to cough artificially, but I do not shrink from the truth. I knew that I was being alluded to, but I knew also that there was no more danger of my being puffed up by self-conceit than of a proprietary stamp enriching the contents of the original package.

"He's.....tender-hearted, Auntie..... couldn't bear.....Paul's chickens."

".....like your.....Uncle Philip!"

".....wouldn't slap.....mosquito."
(No; I'd rather blow him from the mouth of a cannon. H. C.)

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"Poor Philip.....once stepped.....
toad.....quite ill."

"Henry so thoughtful do
anything.....make me happy."

"Yes kindest husband so
much sense.....Philip different.....
wouldn't listen.....about farm."

"Mr. Fairman devoted be
happy.....do anything."

"Oh, Marion!.....think I'm.....old
goose."

I know when a conversation becomes
confidential, and I quietly retreated without
hearing anything further except some in-
distinct murmuring and happy sobs.

From the day my bank account was in-
creased by the sum of five thousand dollars
I made up my mind to spend it all, if neces-
sary, in the purchase of Waydean. I ex-
ulted in the anticipation of Marion's delight
and amazement on finding that I had pre-
ferred to do this in place of frittering it
away in luxuries that we could do without,
or investing it in stocks. I almost wished
her birthday was at hand so that I could

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celebrate the day by making her a present of the place ; then the idea of giving it to her on Aunt Sophy's wedding-day entered my mind, and this seemed such a capital plan that I decided to carry it out. Few men, I meditated, would have thought of such a graceful acknowledgment of Aunt Sophy's kindness, and I felt that Marion would be doubly pleased that I should think of adding to the joy of the eventful day. I could not help wondering what my wife intended doing with her money, but she didn't say anything to enlighten me, and I took good care not to allude to it, for fear she should question me in return. She made frequent trips to the city, carrying her little bank-book with an air of importance, but I could see nothing in the results of her shopping to indicate lavish expenditure. For instance, on one trip she bought a wire potato masher for seven cents, a spice cabinet for thirty cents, sixty cents worth of trimming for an old hat, and a pair of silk suspenders for me. The price mark on the latter was carefully obliterated, being a present, so I couldn't tell what they cost ;

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anyway, it wouldn't have been proper to look at the price, if it had been legible. Evidently, at that rate of spending she would have enough money left to stock the farm when it became hers.

The real estate agent whom I consulted smiled loftily when I alluded to Peter Waydean's reputation for shrewdness and over-reaching. "Don't concern yourself about that, Mr. Carton," he said. "We business men are accustomed to deal with these close-fisted farmers. They usually know the value of a farm as well as we do, but we know how to get them down to the bottom figure. We don't run after the owner and let him think we're anxious to buy; we approach him in the most incidental manner, dangling the bait, so to speak, until he's afraid someone else is going to snap it up. Now, the Waydean farm I take to be worth about thirty-five hundred, and you say the old man talks of selling, so if you allow a margin of a hundred or two I think I can secure it without any trouble."

The calm confidence of Mr. Brooks elated me; after telling him he might go as high

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as four thousand dollars, I went home, calculating on the way how I would spend the remaining thousand that I would still have to the good.

A week later Brooks shook his head as I entered his office. "We haven't quite got that deal through, Mr. Carton," he said. "The fact is that there seems to be a snag. Old man appears willing to sell—quite genial and all that, but when it comes to figures he fights shy; says he wants more time to think. To hurry him up I made a straight offer of four thousand. I could see that he was inclined to gobble it, but he held back, and when I went out yesterday I discovered why. Ever hear of that being a likely spot for oil or gas?"

"Good heavens, no!" I cried.

He smiled at my evident alarm. "I haven't either," he assured me, "but I thought perhaps you might have inside information. The idea came into my head when I found there was another party as keen to get the place as you."

"Another—party?" I gasped.

"I met Roper—of Bates and Roper, you

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know—coming out of the old man's house yesterday. I guess we each suspected the other of being on a private speculation, but after considerable sounding I found that he had been commissioned to buy the place. Then it struck me that you and this other party might have been quietly prospecting."

I shook my head. "I'm not after oil or gas wells or anything else in that line," I said decidedly. "I want the place for a quiet home. Who is this other—man?"

"I don't know. Roper didn't name his client, and of course I didn't name mine, but as far as I can make out we've both had similar instructions. It looks as if the old man were holding off to see who would make the highest bid. Now it isn't worth more than four thousand, but you can decide whether to bid higher or let it go."

If anything could have made me more eager it was the knowledge that someone else wanted Waydean. The thought of Marion's dismay if our home should be sold over our heads filled me with the determination to settle the matter at once. I

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told Brooks to go ahead to the extent of five thousand dollars.

“ Well,” he said, shaking his head with reluctance, “ I’d rather lose my commission than see you give that, for the land isn’t worth the money,—that is, for farming,” he added, with a shrewd glance at me,—“ but that’s your look-out, and I’ll do my best.”

X

UNCLE BENNY CREATES A DIVERSION

IT was during the first eighteen months of our life at Waydean that I wrote "The Meditations of Uncle Benny" for the *Observer*. I do not allude to these sketches as anything out of the ordinary, for there are times, as Marion says, when it is well for one to neither affirm nor deny the truth. Why it is wrong for me to voice a just and critical appreciation of my literary work, and proper for my wife to openly admire her newly scrubbed floor or her arrangement of flowers in a vase, I cannot see. Nor can I get her to explain; she prefers to say that if I cannot see for myself it would be useless for her to try to make me understand,—a baffling inconsequent remark. Nevertheless I am willing to believe that some things are too subtle for my comprehension, and that her instinct is invariably

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to be depended upon; also, that the less I express my admiration for what I have written, the more open and unrestrained her appreciation will become. Consequently, although when the first of the Uncle Benny sketches appeared in print I laughed and applauded as heartily as if the author were unknown to me, I learned to regard the later ones with almost gloomy indifference, or even to subject them to adverse criticism, this course being the one most likely to lead my wife to praise the artistic excellence of my work.

Personally, I make no claim to artistic excellence,—it would be neither becoming nor tactful for me to do so,—but I may mention that the circulation of the *Weekly Observer* doubled, and then trebled; also that as a result of the popularity of Uncle Benny it soon became necessary to copy-right each instalment in advance of publication to prevent unauthorized copying by exchanges. I have noticed that to some authors is given the art of writing so that their work appeals to their fellow-creatures at a certain stage of development; others,

Uncle Benny Creates a Diversion

again, have that broad human sympathy that puts them in touch with young and old, cultured and uncultured, wise and foolish. I had no wish to add to the sum of human wisdom and culture, but it was a delight to me that Uncle Benny made people merrier. Paul, at the age of seven, William Wedder, three score years older, were equally infatuated. On Saturday mornings Paul would insist upon having Uncle Benny read aloud to him during breakfast, then he would carry off the paper to peruse it himself at leisure, while William could ill conceal his impatience at having to await his turn. Most authors read their own works aloud, in public, to their friends, or in the family circle ; I do not. It is only fair to state that I might not have reached this exalted plane but for my wife. It was she who made me understand the injustice, the blind selfishness, the distressing egotism that permits an author, revelling in the enjoyment of his own imaginings, to inflict them upon a helpless listener whose capacity for appreciation is so infinitesimal in comparison. It was she who showed me

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that Rossetti's sketch of Tennyson reading Maud was not merely a crude picture of the great poet by his friend, but a revelation of the long pent-up sufferings of one who was doomed to sit in an attitude of attention, under the watchful eye of The Author Who Reads His Own Works, ready to respond at a glance with a nod, a smile or a tear.

Therefore it was Marion who read Uncle Benny to Paul and Aunt Sophy and the author ; it was I who, one morning during the reading, heard an unusual sound from the kitchen. Fearing that William, who was taking his breakfast there, had at last miscalculated his swallowing capacity and needed help, I quietly withdrew from the table and opened the door into the kitchen. To my amazement it collided with William's head, and he straightened himself up when he had recovered his equilibrium and looked at me with flushed cheeks and a foolish smile, making no attempt at explanation. Did I ask for one? Certainly not. I begged his pardon and hastened to get the liniment as if it was a most reprehensible act of mine to open the door without warn-

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ing. I felt angry and humiliated that he had placed me in such an awkward position, but I could not be brutal enough to show my resentment by accusing him of eavesdropping, especially when it appeared to be the case. When he had recovered his speech and remarked incidentally that he was in the act of picking up his hard-boiled egg which had rolled in front of the door, I expressed the keenest regret for my carelessness and assured him I would be more cautious in future.

Yet the revelation of his depravity was a distinct shock to us until I found that it was the reading of Uncle Benny that had attracted the dear old man, and that he could not resist the impulse to get within earshot.

"I may as well own up," he confessed, at last, "that the way the missis reads them stories is as refreshin' to my mind as raspberry pies is to my stomach. She do read most beautiful, and when I hear Master Paul chippin' in with them odd sayin's and you and that old lady laughin' so cheery I jest can't help listenin'."

William's spontaneous appreciation was

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delightful, and I found his admiration for my fictitious Uncle Benny most amusing, considering how unconscious he was that I was the author, and that he cordially detested the original of the character, Peter Waydean. But I ceased to enjoy his enthusiasm when it threatened to become a mania, for he unbosomed himself one day of a plan he had made to go to the city to make the personal acquaintance of Uncle Benny at the *Observer* office. I tried to dislodge this idea, showing him the absurdity of looking for a person who probably didn't exist, but I was mistaken in thinking my arguments effective, for in a few days I found a letter at my office addressed to Uncle Benny in William's crooked handwriting. I read it with rising indignation.

"Dear Uncle Benny," he wrote. "I am unknown to you and you to me but your writings has made me feel as if we was old chums. I wanted to go to the city to have a chat with you but the boss he kicked. He says I might be took up for a lunatic if I went to the Observer asking for you. He

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says there aint no such person and if there was he would be some young whip snap that would call the devil and the hoist man to run me out for thinking he was a old man like me. He says it aint none of my business how old you be and what you look like. He says your blame curiosity William might land you in the police cells. Now as far as I can make out you must be well up in years and you write darn good stories. Now I got one or two good stories about the boss that is too good to keep. He aint a regular farmer and he don't know much about working land. He says the way to make the farm pay is to keep from paying out money on it and when I tell him we need a implement he asks how much will it cost and when I tell him he puts that much in the bank and says we can do without. There aint a implement on the place but three. That shows what kind of a man he is but I ain't going to let him scare me off if you drop me a line to say you want to hear them stories.

“WILLIAM WEDDER.”

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It was well that I was not within reach of William when I read his epistle, for my wrath would have descended upon him, but having time to think it over before I reached home I concluded to preserve my incognito by ignoring the matter ; besides, I was exceptionally busy that week as Aunt Sophy's wedding was near at hand, and I could not afford to risk the loss of his services at such a time.

As I neared the house that afternoon I heard loud voices in the yard, and when I got within sight I saw my hired man and Peter Waydean walking around each other in the attitude of quarrelsome dogs about to spring.

"I tell you," snarled Peter, "them darn hens has been living on my field peas, and I believe you drove them over there in the first place."

"And I tell you," snapped William, "your cattle has broke down the fence and got into my corn twice this week, and your blame hogs——"

At this point I intervened. Peter claimed that his crop of peas had been so destroyed

Uncle Benny Creates a Diversion

by fowls that it couldn't be harvested; he hadn't actually seen my hens at work, he admitted, but they must have done the damage. In rebuttal, William contended that our fowls were honest well-conducted stay-at-homes; they weren't driven away to forage on other people's garden stuff like some cattle and hogs.

"What's a few corn-stalks?" shouted Peter.

"What's a few peas?" retorted William.

Again I interposed, but I had to send William away to milk before my landlord could be placated enough to lower his voice to a reasonable pitch, then my anger suddenly flamed to a white heat. I had intended to soothe his ruffled feelings by paying for the damage, but instead, I found myself resenting the imputation that my hens, brought up from the shell to habits of virtue and propriety, could be guilty of such dishonesty. Still, my tone was calm and my manner patronizing as I challenged him to prove his charge; then before he had recovered from his astonishment I advised him to overcome the besetting sin of avarice

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that prompted him to swindle me in every possible way.

I saw that he knew his own weakness, he was so stung by my words; but there was more of malicious triumph than of blind anger in the ring of his voice. "Proof!" he ejaculated contemptuously. "The kind of proof you'll get is to have them hens come home without their feathers on if I catch them in my fields. I've a bit of news for you," he went on, with a grin of satisfaction. "I've had two good offers to sell the place and I was going to give you the chance of topping them, but now that you've broke out into insulting language I wouldn't sell to you if you offered me ten thousand dollars."

It was with difficulty that I repressed my amusement; he was so obviously unsuspecting that I was a bidder, and when I assured him that the news didn't cause me any concern he grew still more angry.

"I'll go to the city to-morrow," he threatened me, "and I'll sell to whichever of them two men wants to live on the place, and you'll have to move when your lease is up."

Uncle Benny Creates a Diversion

Again I smiled; nothing he could do would suit me better than to have him hurry up in closing the bargain, but I tried to look as if my smile were forced to hide my disappointment. Peter glanced at me suspiciously as he turned away.

It is quite an ordinary occurrence to have one's chickens come home to roost, but not without their feathers, as two of mine did the next day. I could not look at them without a shudder, yet I could not keep from looking at them, and until Marion clothed them in two tiny shirts that Paul had worn in his infancy I could not smile at the fascinating absurdity of their appearance and the consternation of their friends and relatives. It was only too clear why Peter had not carried out his threat of going to the city that day to close the sale of the place; he had been lying in wait for my unfortunate chickens in his pea-field. My blood boiled at the thought of how the malevolent rascal must be chuckling over the way he had proved his case, but my anger was trifling in comparison with William's.

"I tell you, Mr. Carton," he affirmed,

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“I’ll pay him back. I’ll make him the laughin’ stock of the county. Let me catch one of his critters on this side of the fence, and he won’t be able to tell whether it’s a bird of the air or a beast of the field when it goes home.”

XI

THE WEDDING-DAY.

MY cheerful, almost sprightly manner, at breakfast on the morning of Aunt Sophy's wedding-day cost me an effort, for instead of being able to make Marion a present of Waydean, as I had planned, I was compelled to conceal the depression I felt at the news from my agent that Peter had sold the place to the "other party," Roper's client. I noticed, during breakfast, that Marion and Aunt Sophy were continually exchanging confidential smiles and glances that were not intended to include me, for they looked consciously unconscious and avoided my eyes when I happened to intercept one of the silent messages. Still, I was so engaged in looking happy and free from care that the idea of Marion having prepared a surprise for me never entered my mind, although I wondered, when she handed me my mail

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which William had brought from the post-office, why they both stared at me with such an appearance of eager expectation. At the bottom of the pile my eye was attracted by an envelope with, "Bates and Roper, Land Agents," printed in one corner. It was addressed to Marion, and as I held it up inquiringly she clapped her hands with delight and urged me with impatient vehemence to read it. With a sickening premonition of what was coming I drew out the enclosure with trembling fingers and read a formal notification from the firm to Mrs. Henry Carton that they had, according to instructions, made an agreement with Peter Waydean for the purchase of his farm for the sum of five thousand, one hundred dollars. For a moment I forgot Marion and Paul and Aunt Sophy as I stared at the paper with open mouth and distended eyes, a ghastly gray-green pallor, so Marion told me afterwards, spreading over my face. A smothered shriek of alarm and the first strident prolonged note of Paul's howl brought me to my senses; my eyes turned slowly with the glassy stare of an owl. I

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had a jumbled idea that Marion's money was gone, also mine, also the farm; we had been bidding against each other and were ruined.

"What is it, Henry?" gasped Aunt Sophy, pressing one hand to her side and breathing heavily.

"Speak, Henry!" cried Marion.

"We've been sold—buncoed—duped. Old Peter—" I began thickly.

"You goose!" exclaimed Marion, with a laugh of sudden relief. "You misunderstand the letter. Of course old Peter has sold the place, but to me!—to *me*—do you understand? And I hereby make you a present of it to-day, because——"

"Because it's my wedding-day," interjected Aunt Sophy, wiping away tears of happiness. "I thought I'd like to see how pleased and proud you'd look before I go."

I awoke to my responsibilities and made a sickly attempt to look gratified. "What a—joyful surprise!" I stammered. "Awfully obliged—not so much for—pecuniary value—as a token of—the day that—" My voice was lost in a peal of laughter.

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"Oh, how funny! Just like your Uncle Philip, Marion."

"He always will have his little joke, Auntie. Come now, Henry, do be serious, and I'll tell you what a narrow escape we had. There was another man—Mr. Roper called him a 'party'—after the place."

"After the place!" I repeated, with profound incredulity.

"There now—I thought you'd be startled. This man had employed Mr. Brooks to negotiate with Peter, and he kept bidding higher and higher till I was awfully afraid he'd get it. Then I got desperate, and I drew the hundred dollars that I had in the savings bank, for I had an idea that the 'party' would stop at five thousand—and he did—and just yesterday Peter signed the agreement, and I have the cheque for five thousand one hundred dollars all ready to pay over as soon as the legal documents are signed."

"Well," I commented, drawing a long breath, "it's a good thing he stopped."

"And wasn't Marion clever to manage so well?" asked Aunt Sophy.

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"She was indeed," I responded warmly. "I would have given up at five thousand."

Then Marion wondered who the man was, speaking as if he had ceased to exist, and so did Aunt Sophy. I was on the point of wondering also, when it struck me that I could not truthfully do so, and I merely said that as I knew Brooks pretty well he would probably mention the man's name to me, a statement that was unassailable even from Marion's pinnacle of morality, and one that helped me to keep my secret until after Aunt Sophy's departure.

It was well that I had completed my arrangements the day before, for I was so distraught by the ordeal I had passed through that I had difficulty even in remembering that I must hurry away to the station to meet Mr. Fairman, who was due to arrive on the ten o'clock train, and must be entertained by me until the minister appeared to perform the marriage ceremony at eleven. Not having an equipage of my own, I had hired the most presentable one to be found in the neighborhood, and the horse being warranted tractable by his

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owner, Joe Wrigley, I had no hesitation in driving to the station and back myself, although as a usual thing, if I have to be near a horse I prefer to be in a position where I can look him in the eye.

I had been rather irritated by William's behavior that morning, for he had disappeared for an hour after breakfast just when I most needed him, and when he did appear he explained that he had been busy in the smokehouse rigging up a scarecrow and hadn't heard me calling him. This excuse seemed plausible at the time, though I remembered afterwards it was not the season to scare crows, for he had got permission from Marion the day before to take a discarded sun-bonnet of hers and a pair of Paul's long rubber boots for the purpose, so I warned him to be at the gate to open it when I returned, and drove away. It was not until it was too late to turn back that I found the reins were sticky with grafting wax where William had held them, and that it had melted with the warmth of my hands and ruined my new gloves. It was while I was trying to scrape the wax off with my

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pocket knife that Peter Waydean stopped me to ask if I had seen a pig of his that had been missing since the day before. It was the first time I had seen him since our quarrel, so I answered briefly in the negative and drove on, but I noticed that he looked after me with surly suspicion, as if he thought I had it concealed under the seat.

Now when I returned half an hour later I was engrossed in conversation with Mr. Fairman, and I had forgotten all about Peter's quest. The horse was trotting along at a creditable pace ; Mr. Fairman sat upright beside me in starched and immaculate apparel, trying to appear unconcerned about his approaching fate ; I, flicking the animal in the most artfully casual manner to keep him going, had on my best company manners. Perhaps this phrase may suggest effort, constraint, artificiality, but I have been told by Marion that no one could possibly be more charming in manner than I, when I choose to be agreeable, but that when I—but there, I like to take the sweet without the bitter, and the rest is quite ir-

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relevant. I was suave, genial, sympathetic; Mr. Fairman, in that blissfully exalted mood so natural to the occasion, had just drawn my attention to the idyllic beauty of Nature's autumn garb, when suddenly up from the dry ditch at the roadside stumbled Peter Waydean, a dishevelled, disreputable blot upon the scene. Frantically waving his arms, he shouted an invitation to me to stop and give him a chance to do me up. I had an idea that he called me a pig, but we were bowling along at such a rate that I couldn't be sure of his words, though there could be no doubt of his general intentions. For various reasons I did not attempt to stop, and my attention was immediately distracted from him by the sight of Marion's old sun-bonnet bobbing up and down in the ditch some distance ahead. If it had been hanging on a tree or lying on the roadside, I would have been quite surprised, but to see it travel along with unvarying speed and apparent dogged intention in a straight line along the inner side of the ditch seemed very like a miracle. That it could do so without legs was inconceivable; that legs

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could belong to it was marvellous, but if so, how many, what size and shape? I whipped up the horse, with a passing glance at Mr. Fairman. His eyes were riveted on the bonnet with eager wonderment; he had plainly forgotten for the moment that he was on his way to his wedding. As we neared the lower level of the road we were slightly ahead, and I checked the speed of the horse at the foot of a slope where the ditch ended; just in time, for like a dissolving view there dashed across the road directly in front of us the most grotesque object in the way of a quadruped that could be imagined. Its head was hidden in the sun-bonnet; the short fore-feet were completely encased in Paul's worn-out rubber boots; the body, instead of being hairy, was feathered like that of a Plymouth Rock hen; around the hind legs flapped a tiny pair of blue trousers—only a curly little tail remained to show it was a pig.

It came; it vanished. At the same instant Joe Wrigley's horse stood up very straight on his hind legs and then prepared to sit down on our laps. Without a word,

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Mr. Fairman leaned sideways and tried to climb head first over the wheel. I had just time to rescue him by seizing his coat-tails with one hand while I lashed the horse with the whip. The effect of that blow was electrical, for with a bound the animal sprang forward at a pace that first astonished, and then alarmed me. We passed the Waydean gate at racing speed, and in a fleeting glimpse of William as he stood there I saw a broad grin merge into open-mouthed horror, and I had the grim satisfaction of knowing that the enjoyment of his handiwork was swallowed up in remorse. In vain I tugged at the reins; the horse had the bit between his teeth, and the only effect was to slacken the traces and put the strain of drawing the vehicle on my arms. Perhaps if I had been alone I would have felt afraid and have resigned myself to disaster, but I was filled with a fierce resolve to save Mr. Fairman and see him safely married, as arranged.

He sat bolt upright now, his face pale and drawn as he gripped the seat with both hands. I had no breath to waste, so I re-

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mained silent until he said, in feeble gasps :
“ I think—perhaps—I’d better—get out.”

It was then that my mind reached an altitude of far-seeing clear-sighted wisdom that, under the perilous circumstances, was akin to inspiration. Although ordinary men similarly placed would have reviewed their past misdeeds, or have looked forward with selfish misgiving to approaching dissolution, I did not think of my own danger ; my mind was fully occupied with the problem of how to save my companion for his marriage at eleven o’clock. In case this mental attitude may seem heroic, I wish to say frankly that it didn’t seem so to me ; if it should be supposed that the impulse was a noble one, let me say that I had no intention of acting nobly ; I also bitterly repel Marion’s insinuation that it was an ignoble one. The fact is, it did not occur to me that I should analyze my motive, but if I had known how I would be catechized later I would have done so, and thus have avoided trouble.

As he spoke, Mr. Fairman gazed with longing eyes at the ground that seemed so

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invitingly near, with only the upper half of a rapidly revolving wheel to bar his descent. I knew that if I left him to himself he would take that fatal jump, yet I could not have moved a finger to stop him, for I dared not relax my hold on the reins. I must overcome with calm and decisive reasoning the alluring idea that had taken possession of him.

"Mr. Fairman," I said, with quiet authority, "there is—no cause—for alarm." He looked beseechingly at me, and I felt encouraged. "If you—jumped—" I continued jerkily, my words punctuated by the jolting of the vehicle, "you would either—be killed—" he shuddered—"or mangled." He stared at me with dumb appeal. "If the buggy were—in front—of a runaway horse—we'd have to jump, but since—we're behind—our best plan is to remain—seated—as long as—possible." A faint smile flickered at the corners of his mouth. "We're absolutely safe—" I urged, "on the seat—but danger begins when we—leave it."

Mr. Fairman gulped. "I see," he said;

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“you’ve got a head. Don’t—let me—jump.”

I needed all the head I had, for while the road had been clear so far, I descried a load of hay on the narrow bridge that stretched over the little river in front of us. There was no chance of passing to one side, and I wondered whether the horse would try to plunge through the load or jump over the railing of the bridge. He did neither, for I saw just in time that a track led down to the river, where farmers drove through when the water was low. Pulling with all my strength on one rein, I managed to turn the horse off the main road and we headed straight for the river. A shout of horror arose from my companion, and I had to drop the reins and clasp him in my arms to keep him from jumping out. There was a mighty splash, a sudden shock that almost flung us over the dashboard, and then Joe Wrigley’s horse walked,—yes walked, calmly and sedately to the opposite shore. We were safe and dry-shod, but alas!—stranded in mid-stream. The horse had the shafts; we had the buggy. I looked at my watch;

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time, twenty-five minutes to eleven. We were a mile beyond Waydean, but it was possible to walk there in twenty minutes, if we could get to dry land. No one was in sight along the road, and the load of hay had lumbered on, the driver happily unconscious of how he had been saved from sudden disaster. Mr. Fairman, though still pale and agitated, had recovered enough to remember his appointment, and was dismayed at our situation. I had to give up, regretfully, for want of time, a fascinating plan of taking off the buggy-top to float shorewards in; a glance at his gleaming boots and irreproachable trousers caused me to scout the thought of his wading; there was but one course open to me. With many apologies I removed my lower garments; with more apologies I begged Mr. Fairman to do me the favor of carrying them, and stepped into the water. Then I showed him how to gather the skirts of his coat under his arms, get on my back and hold his legs straight out to keep them from touching the water. He politely protested; I insisted; he yielded. I am almost certain

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I heard him chuckle on the journey ; I knew he vibrated in a suspicious manner ; but when I set him down on shore he was quite solemn in thanking me, and his eyes were moist with emotion as he watched me dry myself with the buggy-duster and get into my clothes.

In my young days I often wished I could have an opportunity to save a human life ; indeed, I have always held myself in readiness to plunge into any depth of water up to four feet if occasion should arise, and it is all the more remarkable that I really didn't think of having saved Mr. Fairman's life until he mentioned it. But when I looked back I saw that I had saved him at least four times in a quarter of an hour. First, by not abandoning my post when the horse tried to sit down in the buggy ; second, by overcoming his impulse to jump out by my cold dispassionate logic ; third, by holding him in the seat when we approached the river ; fourth, by rescuing him from the shipwrecked buggy in perfect condition for his wedding.

When we met William Wedder hurrying

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along the road in search of us, his anxious and crestfallen air showing how much he regretted having been the cause of the accident, I did not stop to reproach him but sent him on to bring the horse and buggy to Waydean. Fortunately, Aunt Sophy and Marion, knowing nothing of our adventure, had been spared much anxiety, and it was not until after the brief marriage ceremony that Mr. Fairman related how, but for my heroic conduct, Aunt Sophy would not now be Mrs. Fairman. I must say he did me a little more than justice, and I did my best to faintly depreciate my heroism. I found Aunt Sophy's warm-hearted and impulsive demonstration most embarrassing, but it was a peculiar expression of scepticism on Marion's face that made me wish I had not been accused of acting heroically.

It was not until the Fairmans had departed and the flutter of Aunt Sophy's handkerchief from the car-window was no longer visible that Marion had a chance to speak to me alone; then she lost no time.

"Now," she said, turning to me with an impatient little tap of her foot, "I want to

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know the truth about that horse. Didn't you only pretend he ran away?"

"Pretend!" I exclaimed, with rightful indignation, the muscles of my arms still tingling with the strain.

"Yes," she insisted, with the resolute look that I knew only too well; a look meaning that no matter what the evidence I would be adjudged guilty; naturally, I flushed under her gaze. "I knew from your manner that you had done something you were ashamed of. Did you do it for one of those insane practical jokes, or because you wanted to convince Mr. Fairman that you are the paragon that Aunt Sophy thinks you?"

My irritation vanished; being innocent, I could forgive my wife's suspicion. "The fact is, Marion," I explained, with complete candor, "that brute of Joe Wrigley's had the bit between his teeth and I couldn't stop him."

She laughed scornfully. "He had the bit between his teeth! Just what you told poor Mr. Fairman. May I ask where you would have liked his bit to be? Between

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his eyes or his ears, perhaps. If you had a bit in your mouth wouldn't it have to be between your teeth?"

I knew her argument was defective, but I got too flustered to think where the weakness lay, for I felt the matter was getting serious. It is one thing to have the satisfaction of showing your wife that she has made a blunder; it is another to confirm her suspicions by your denial. In the end she did appear to believe that the horse ran away and that I really had tried, with some small measure of success, to save Mr. Fairman's life, but that didn't end the matter. Marion has unusual psychological insight. Not only can she unearth thoughts and motives that I am conscious of having, but she can go deeper still, delving into unexplored regions of sub-consciousness to find the thoughts and motives that I am not aware of having.

"How strange!" she mused. "You had time to think of so much in those few minutes. Did I understand you to say that your *one* idea was to save Mr. Fairman?"

"Well, that was the dominant one. The

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other thoughts that flashed through my mind were all dependent on it, as the tones of a musical scale are related to the tonic."

Not once in years do I think of so apt an illustration within five minutes of the time I need it, and I was so wrapped up in conceit of my remark that I walked, open-eyed but unseeing, into the most transparent pitfall. Knowing, in my innocence, that I had nothing to conceal, I forgot for the time that I must be on my guard against Marion's digging up something that wasn't there.

"And you never considered," she asked, "how dreadful it would be for Paul and me if anything happened to you?"

"It never entered my mind," I answered confidently, "but I can tell you I was afraid the old gentleman would be killed or mangled before he was married—then where would Aunt Sophy have been?"

"Where would Aunt Sophy have *been*?"

"Don't you see," I explained, with a confidential lowering of my voice, "that if he had been killed before the ceremony she would have been left out in the cold;

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whereas, afterwards it wouldn't matter—ah—so much."

"Wouldn't *matter*—so——"

"In a pecuniary sense," I interjected nervously. "I know she'd be heartbroken and all that, but as a widow—I mean, as his widow—she'd be wealthy, and—and—she'd get over——"

By Marion's stony glare I knew I had struck quicksand; I felt myself sinking and made one despairing effort to recover my footing. "Of course, I made up my mind that if I didn't pull him through safely, I'd give back my five thousand to Aunt Sophy, but— Good Heavens! Marion—what's the matter?"

It has been my lot to arouse anger, sorrow, despair, scorn, and various other sentiments consecutively, but never before had I seen them expressed in one composite glance.

"So *that* was your motive," she said, with stinging, withering emphasis. "You clutched Mr. Fairman as a miser might clutch his hoard if his house took fire. It wasn't to save his life; it wasn't for Aunt

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Sophy's sake ; he was merely a money sack. Henry, if you hadn't confessed it yourself I wouldn't have believed you were such a mercenary wretch. No wonder you looked ashamed."

We had just reached the house, and I had no chance to clear my character before Marion ran upstairs and locked herself in her room, so I thought it politic to leave her in silence for a while. I was bristling with indignation, for while I hadn't pretended that my conduct was praiseworthy, I knew that I had not been cold-blooded and calculating enough to try to save Mr. Fairman from the motive she had suggested. Indeed, I saw that the explanation that I had formulated in response to Marion's insistent questions had no foundation in fact, except possibly a fragmentary impression that may have flashed across my mind for an instant during our imminent peril, yet I had been thick-headed enough to make it appear that I had been influenced by these considerations instead of confessing that I had invented them as an afterthought. I knew I should be able to

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make Marion see the matter in this light when she had been sufficiently long in seclusion; in the meantime, I went around to the rear of the house to find William Wedder and to settle my score with him.

I met him looking for me, dressed up in his best clothes and carrying his red bundle and stick.

"William," I said, in my most austere manner, "I haven't had a chance to tell you what I think of your con——"

"No, sir," he broke in, "and I'm not calculatin' to give you a chance. I'm off."

"You're—off!" I ejaculated, my anger suddenly displaced by dismay. "What—what's the matter?"

"Well, sir," answered William, his face broadening to a grin, "there's several reasons why I'd better be off. One is, I'd rather go than be sacked; then, old Waydean, he's took the notion that I dressed up his pig, and Joe Wrigley says he's gone to swear out a summons."

His manner was so coy, so engaging, so innocently virtuous and forbearing, that I

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could not refrain from an encouraging smile; somehow I seemed to know exactly how he felt—perhaps I, too, in some previous state of existence, had found it expedient to appear to know less than I did know.

“What became of the pig, William?” I asked, in a tone that conveyed, I fear, more sympathy than reproof.

“After you drove off so fast,” he replied, “it turned onto the Stone Road, with old Waydean close behind, and that was the last I seen of them, but Joe Wrigley says they met a funeral near the Stone Road Cemetery, and there was a regular circus; after it was over I seen people drivin’ past here lookin’ as if they’d been at a Punch and Judy show.”

I smiled appreciatively, feeling a softening toward William in view of the entertainment he had provided, but I saw it would be wiser for him to leave than to wait for Peter’s revenge. There was one more point that puzzled me.

“How did you fasten those boots on the pig?” I asked.

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There was a momentary triumphant gleam in his eyes, then they opened wide with innocent frankness as he spoke. "Joe Wrigley says there was a wad of graftin' wax in each one, and the longer they were on the tighter they'd stick. Joe says——"

"William," I interrupted, "why do you keep saying that Joe Wrigley says this and Joe Wrigley says that, when you——"

One eyelid slowly curtained an eye. "You see, Mr. Carton," he said, in a half-whisper, "if you don't know nothin' but what Joe says, you don't know enough for evidence, nor too much for your own good, and if that old sinner makes law trouble you can't swear to anythin' but hearsay. Joe says it's like a sort of judgment on him, for it'll take as long to get the feathers and wax off that pig as it'll take new feathers to grow on them chickens. He says there ain't but three ways of gettin' that kind of wax off: bilin' in kerosene, freezin' in a ice-cream freezer, or leavin' it to nature and the habits of pigs."

"Well, William," I said regretfully, "I suppose you had better go, but I'll have to

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get another man to do the work, for I'll have the farm on my hands in a few days. Peter has signed the agreement to sell."

"Jee—rus'lem!" he exclaimed. "It'll be a bigger circus than I counted on when——"

"When what?" I asked, as he suddenly checked himself.

"I was thinkin' about the new well up at the barn," he replied, with sudden gravity. "I haven't got down to water yet, but it ain't far off, and Joe Wrigley says he'll come over to-morrow and finish it for you. Well, I must be goin'—good-by for the present. Mebbe I'll come back when this blows over."

"Where are you going to?" I called after him, as he hurried off.

His legs moved faster, as if he feared pursuit, but there was no response until he reached the gate, then he turned and shouted: "To see—Uncle—Benny!"

It is painfully humiliating to stand before a locked door and try to convince a silent person inside that you have high ideals, noble impulses, virtuous aspirations and an

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unvarying regard for the truth; it is yet more painful if you are the victim of a train of circumstantial evidence that has biassed the mind of the listener; you are at a further disadvantage if that person is the one who knows your failings better than you do yourself, but there is yet hope if, with all your faults, she loves you still.

I pleaded and reasoned with Marion in a high, unnatural and despairingly mellifluous voice; without avail. Then it occurred to me that I was on the wrong tack, and in a tone of hoarse despair I said I was a brute. This had been effective before, and I listened breathlessly; there was a faint monosyllabic response, but whether of assent or dissent I could not determine. With added anguish I declared that I was and that she needn't say I wasn't; that it would be better for her if I were dead. There was a whole sentence in reply, the gist of it being that she hadn't said I wasn't. This was encouraging, so I sought to create a diversion by telling her that William had gone; this item was coldly received. Then, like an inspiration, came the thought that I had

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still to tell her how we had been bidding against each other.

"Marion," I called out excitedly, "I know the man who tried to buy the place."

"Who is he?"

"Open the door, and I'll tell you."

"No; I can hear."

"He's a perfect brute." I moved away with a heavy tread. It was an excellent move; the door opened and Marion ran after me.

"What's his name?" she demanded.

"He's a man," I replied, with unrepenting, sad forgiveness, "who thought he would try to please his wife by making her a present of the place."

"Good gracious! Was it that wretched Griggs?"

"No,—his name is—Henry Carton."

Now I had expected the announcement to create a sensation, but I was totally unprepared for the effect it produced. Instead of being appalled to learn that she had thrown away sixteen hundred dollars unnecessarily, she forgave me with every appearance of being delighted to hear the

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news. An interval followed, during which I didn't care particularly how this blissful state of affairs had come to pass, but I gathered by degrees that it was because I had quite innocently proved that I was not a mercenary wretch and that I could by no possibility have saved Mr. Fairman's life from any sordid motive. There are probably few men more deserving of praise, but I shall not repeat Marion's expressions of affection and respect, in case they should appear extravagant. I bore her appreciation with my usual modesty, and when she wondered how she could have behaved so, I said it wasn't any wonder at all, and that I was almost sure I wasn't as good as she said. She declared indignantly that I was far better, and when I tried to add that I had acted like a brute she put her hand over my mouth and threatened to get angry again if I used that word about myself, saying that I had acted like an angel, and how could I ever forgive her? I assured her that there was nothing to forgive, but if there was I forgave her freely, and I did so with such fervor and unselfishness that

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she almost melted into tears again. Then with the greatest delicacy I suggested that I was grieved that she had been obliged to pay so much more for the farm than if I hadn't been so stupid, but she only said indifferently, "Bother the money—I've got you!"

Still, I grudged that sixteen hundred dollars, and I thought she ought to show more concern, but I dreaded a return of her suspicion that I was mercenary, so I bothered the money also and remarked that I had her. Then we both made the happy discovery that we had Paul, and Marion reminded me that I had the farm and enough money to stock it, yet in spite of all these blessings it rankled in my mind that when the papers were signed Peter Waydean would have that sixteen hundred dollars above the worth of the farm.

XII

THE EXIT OF WILLIAM WEDDER

THE morning after Aunt Sophy's wedding I slept late, more exhausted by the excitement of the day than I had been aware of, yet in that dreamy state of half-wakefulness before sunrise, I was dimly conscious of hearing the sound of Joe Wrigley's pick and shovel, as he worked at the unfinished well. I remembered that I must go to the city and arrange with Marion's agent for the transfer of the property, and also be ready, in my rôle of Uncle Benny, to receive William Wedder, if he should call at the *Observer* office as he had threatened. I was drowsily exulting in William's discomfiture on finding that I was Uncle Benny, when a loud shouting from the direction of the barn awakened me; a moment later I heard hurried clumping footsteps and the sound of hammering

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at the back door. My first impression was that the earth had caved in and buried Joe Wrigley and that he had come to me for help, but when I hurried into a few essential garments and reached the back door I was relieved to find that Joe was there; pale, breathless, agitated, but unburied.

"Come quick—*ile!*" he gasped, and lumbered off. I followed.

When I reached the well Peter Waydean was lying prone on his face with his head hanging over the hole. At the sound of my voice he humped himself slowly and stood up, looking at me with an expression of utter misery.

Joe grabbed my arm and pointed to the well. "*Ile,*" he repeated, in a hoarse croak—"smell."

I lay down and smelled; the reeking odor of kerosene oil arose upwards and I staggered to my feet, stunned by a sudden vision of great wealth.

Peter was the first to speak. "The farm's worth half a million," he said despairingly, "and I've sold it to that shark for fifty-one hundred."

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"What shark?" I forced myself to ask.

"That land shark in the city," he said, turning away with a sudden stiffening of his frame. "But I'll not be robbed," he shouted, raising his clenched hand above his head in a fierce gesture—"he hasn't got the deed yet."

I watched him hurry over the adjoining field, a strange pitying impulse possessing me to run after him and tell him to take back the farm; then Joe attracted my attention.

"Jest as I struck that streak of clay," he said, pointing downwards, "I seen it get soppy like, but I thought it was water, for I took the smell to be from the ile on my hair, settled into contracted quarters like; then it began to bubble up faster, an' I scooped up a handful to taste, an' the next thing I knowed I was up here hollerin' for all I was worth. Old Peter, he come runnin' over the pasture field, an' I lit out for the house to call you."

In the well I could see a slight bubbling as the oil ran in, and the bottom was now covered with several inches of the fluid,

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which looked remarkably clear and of such fine quality that I didn't wonder Joe had mistaken it for water. I told him to stop work and cover the hole with boards, warning him not to tell anyone of the discovery. I don't know why I gave him the latter direction, but I had an instinct that it was the correct thing to do and was an evidence of presence of mind on my part. Then I went back to the house to break the news to Marion.

In my inmost heart I knew that the wealth was rightfully Peter's, though I was legally entitled to reap the benefit of the discovery, but something of the passionate greed that I had seen expressed in his distorted face stirred my soul, and I went upstairs to tell Marion, feeling, I imagine, like a fugitive bank cashier. But when I looked into her clear eyes I knew there was but one right course, and that was to release Peter from his agreement. Somehow I felt as if I had just escaped from prison when that was settled; never again do I wish to be burdened with even the thought of un-worked-for riches.

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I felt sorry for Peter when I hurried over to his house to tell him he could take back his farm without going to law. I regret to say that he did not receive me with open arms or fully appreciate my generosity ; indeed, when I told him that we had employed the land agents to negotiate with him he declared that he never would have signed the agreement if he had known, but he became more amiable when he understood that Marion and I had been bidding against each other.

Now when I act nobly, I like the matter to be distinctly understood ; therefore Peter's attitude was disappointing. There wasn't the slightest doubt but that he should have been so affected by my action as to thank me in a voice broken with emotion, begging me at the same time to accept the office of President of the Waydean Oil Company, and fifty per cent. of the capital stock. I did not try to make him see it in the proper light, for that would have been undignified as well as useless, and I was pressed for time, so I bade him a courteous but frigid good-morning. I knew better

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than to seek consolation from Marion by letting her know that I had expected gratitude, for such a course would have led to the scornful assertion that I had done nothing for which gratitude should be expected. So when she asked if he wasn't awfully grateful I answered in the negative, elevating my eyebrows in surprise. Marion at once asserted that Peter was a grasping hard-hearted man, and tried to show me how nobly I had behaved; a point of view that I protested against, with the result that I was praised to an extent that she has never since excelled.

It was about ten o'clock when I took the train for the city, and for the first time I had leisure to think over the astounding discovery of oil. The short time which had elapsed since I had been awakened by Joe Wrigley had been so full of action that I had difficulty in persuading myself that I hadn't been dreaming, and the farther I got from Waydean, the more incredible appeared the evidence of my senses that I had seen and smelled oil bubbling up at the bottom of my fifteen-foot well.

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The first thing I did when I got to the *Observer* office was to consult the encyclopædia in regard to oil-wells. I do not think I ever received so much mental enlightenment from that useful compendium in such a short space of time, as during the few minutes I spent over the article on petroleum. William Wedder was not mentioned, but when I closed the book with a bang I knew that the ingenious old rogue had not only carried out his threat of making Peter the laughing-stock of the county, but had included me also. For a short time I was beside myself with rage, then an idea leaped into my mind that suggested delightful possibilities, and I hurried down to the front office to find out if William had called that morning.

I have been repeatedly questioned about how I spent the time between lunch and three o'clock, but I have two good reasons for evading a direct answer; one is, that I do not care to say, the other, that I cannot, like some people, tell a lie without provocation. Young Evans, at the Inquiry and Subscription wicket, knew that I told him

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as I went out at noon that if a smooth-shaven countrified-looking old man asked for Uncle Benny he was to be shown up to my room to await my return. Old Jamieson, the elevator man, knew that I entered by the side door about three o'clock, and that I was quite astonished to hear that a visible Uncle Benny had appeared and disappeared during my absence, and that he had been followed into my room by a smooth-shaven rural-looking old codger; that after an interval of loud conversation that could be heard above the rumbling of the presses in the basement, the latter emerged hastily, clattered down the stairs with something in one hand that looked like a human scalp, closely pursued by Uncle Benny, who was excitedly pulling his stovepipe hat down over his ears as he ran, and stopping as he descended the stairs to replace the huge prunella shoes that kept dropping off.

But it was Meldrum, the cartoonist, whose room was opposite mine, who told me most about this strange occurrence. "I thought there was a fire at first," he said, in

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relating the affair. "I got into the hall and saw the most remarkable looking old party sitting at your desk. Hairy as a gorilla—couldn't see a feature except his nose—smoked goggles—white hair to his shoulders—white beard down to his belt—long-skirted frock coat—pants turned up at the bottom, showing his spindle-shanks half way——"

"*Spindle-shanks!*"

"Yes—regular pipe-stems—and prunella shoes, by Jove!—the kind he wore in the ark—voice like a polar bear, and deaf as a door-post. Other chap got completely winded trying to make him hear."

"What was *he* like?"

"Small, smooth-shaven, pink cheeks, blue eyes. Looked like Shem—voice away up in G."

"Could you hear what they said?"

Meldrum laughed derisively. "Hear?" he repeated. "*Hear!* Great Scott! If the presses hadn't been running some idiot on the street would have pulled the fire-alarm, sure. When I saw them first Noah had his hand up to his ear and Shem was

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yelling into it: 'Will — yum Wed — der!'

" 'I see,' growls Noah, 'William was your grandson, and he got married. Go ahead.'

" 'No, no—' shouts Shem, 'that's my *name*. WILL.....YUM WED.....DER!'

" 'You'll have to raise your voice,' says Noah, 'I'm a little hard of hearing.'

" Then Shem goes at it again, a fifth higher, and Noah catches on and asks him a lot of questions. Where he came from, what family, how he happened to leave home. Shem shouts that he isn't a hired man by birth, and that he left his family because his wife and daughter caught the whole-wheat-and-nut-food fever and tried to feed him on hygienic principles, so after building up his strength on unwholesome food for the summer, he's going back to his family to see if they've come to their senses."

" Do you mean to say, Meldrum, that you stood out in the hall and eaves-dropped? "

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“Eavesdropped! Old Wedder’s voice sailed into my room as plainly as if he had the jim-jams. Come now, Carton, you know more about this thing than you pretend. He brought your name in several times, and if I’m not mistaken, he had some good joke on you about your farm. Every little while I’d hear Noah growl, ‘That isn’t funny.’ At last I heard Shem fairly yell, ‘*That* ain’t funny, ain’t it?’—then there was a shout from Noah and a mighty clatter. By the time I got out from behind my desk and into the hall again, all I could see was the top of Noah’s stovepipe vanishing down the stairway. Jamieson is certain Shem had his wig. Come now, Carton, make a clean breast of it and tell me who these old parties were. I always thought you wrote the Uncle Benny papers, but perhaps I was mistaken.”

“Meldrum,” I said confidentially, “I’ll tell you the honest truth, but I want you to keep it quiet. William Wedder was my hired man, and he was determined to see a real Uncle Benny, so to oblige him, I toggled myself out for the part at the theat-

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rical costumer's around the corner. I didn't expect—ha, ha, ha!—to take you in, though.”

I made this explanation with calm sincerity, with child-like frankness, and I'm sure I don't know what prompted me to cast these pearls of truth before a fellow-journalist, but I did. What was the result? Meldrum sniffed at the gems suspiciously, then chuckled, assuring me as he jocularly slapped my back that he was delighted to know the facts of the case and that he would respect my confidence.

This is how the rumor originated that the real Uncle Benny was an aged and talented relative of mine, whom I kept in seclusion to restrain his bibulous propensities. It was perhaps as well that I was not aware of this at the time, or I certainly would have been discouraged from the practice of telling the undiluted truth.

XIII

THE FAIRY WELL

I NEED not dwell upon my return to Waydean that evening. It is still painful to recall my sensations as I stepped from the train, on finding that Joe Wrigley had so completely disregarded my instructions to tell no one of the discovery that the usually quiet country road between the station and Waydean swarmed with pedestrians returning from an inspection of William Wedder's handiwork. Had I been permitted, as I had hoped, to publicly expose the fraud, I could have risen to the occasion and perhaps found a certain solace in doing so; but to find that in my absence the prying eyes of my neighbors had found the ingenious mechanism by which William had manufactured a flowing well of refined petroleum, and had attributed it to me, was crushing. I could bear up under the

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facetious remarks of the people who complimented me on my success in taking such an excellent rise out of Peter, but when Andy Taylor rushed out of his house and clapped me on the back, I could only look at him in sorrowful reproach, at which his merriment increased. "Mr. Carton," he gasped, "it beats the way you done up that Griggs all hollow. I knew you'd get back on Peter, but I didn't know it'd be so—gosh—darn—rich. Oh Lordy, to see him when the loose dirt shifted and showed the blue end of the coal-oil barrel!"

"The coal-oil barrel?"

"Yes,—you'd ought to have laid a few boards of top of the heap, and it wouldn't have shifted with people trampin'. You must have let ten gallons run down that iron pipe—and how did you ever get it drove so far? I suppose that joke cost you as much as five dollars, but I'd say it was cheap at ten."

In vain I assured Andy that I was innocent; he only laughed the harder, reiterating his belief that I beat the Dutch and that I was a natural born play-actor; that the

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Griggs episode, charming as it had been, was discounted by my latest histrionic venture.

By the dim light of my lantern, Marion, Paul and I viewed the wreck of the Way-dean Oil Well when I reached home. Our coal-oil barrel, exhumed from the loose earth that had covered it, had been rolled away from the edge of the hole, leaving the iron pipe exposed. The ground was packed hard with the trampling of many feet.

"I didn't think there could be such a crowd of people in the country, except at a funeral or an auction sale," said Marion indignantly. "I was just enraged to sit in the house and see them pass through the yard as if it were a common. I'll never forgive William Wedder—I wish I had never baked him a pie."

"I hope he'll have to live on hygienic wheat biscuits when he gets home," I responded. "I hope his wife has learned to cook them in two hundred ways, and whether they're mashed, stewed, fried, pied, creamed, puddinged or jellied, he'll have

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disappointment three times a day of finding that they are still the same old wheat biscuits. That'll be punishment enough for him, but it won't make Peter believe I didn't do this, and by this time he must have got Roper's letter cancelling the agreement."

"I suppose we'll have to give up the place in the end," said Marion, with a sigh.

"Don't let Paul hear," I said in a low tone, "or he'll make the dickens of a row."

At that moment Paul was leaning over the edge dangling a long string into the well; fishing, I supposed, in my ignorance. For days he had been going about with a dreamy look on his face that betokened a secret play of absorbing interest. I drew a breath of relief when I saw that he didn't look up at Marion's unguarded remark. All would have been well had I not been so misguided as to make a suggestion that aroused Marion's sense of duty and her persistent belief that I tried to shirk mine.

"Paul," said she, and even in that one word I detected the compassionate severity suitable to the extraction of a tooth—"do you know that we'll have to leave——"

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“Marion,” I implored, “wait till we get him into the house—he’ll rouse the neighborhood.”

I should have known better than to protest. Once started in the track of duty nothing short of a disastrous collision would stop her. She did pause, but merely to make a remark to me that led to a sharp altercation. We forgot our rule never to give way to our angry passions before Paul; indeed, he was so unusually silent that we didn’t remember his presence until we were suddenly struck dumb by a shrill exclamation of impatient wrath that arose from the other side of the well.

“Dar-r-n it!” he ejaculated, with petrifying distinctness.

If he had turned into a quick-firing gun and dropped a shell at our feet the effect could not have been more paralyzing. Our boy had been carefully screened, not only from evil, but from vulgarity; he had never gone to Sunday school, nor been left to the care of a nursemaid. His companions were his toys and domestic pets; other children he had seen only from a distance, and he

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regarded them as curious, but not interesting, little animals. His face reflected the purity of his mind. I hesitate to say so, for obvious reasons, but his face at the age of seven was simply angelic; I mean, of course, normally, not when his mouth was wide open in the act of expressing bodily or mental anguish. And this is not merely his mother's opinion and mine; it is Aunt Sophy's also. Indeed, Aunt Sophy, who is never tired of drawing attention to his remarkable resemblance to a photograph of me as a boy, has gone much farther, and has given utterance to thoughts that we only think.

Therefore, we turned to each other in dumb amazement; then I raised the lantern to make sure that it really was Paul who had spoken. He was getting up from his crouching position and the light showed that his little mouth was tightly set and that his wide-open eyes sparkled like stars. Even as we stared at him his lips parted again, and again he said: "Dar-r-r-n it!"

I am thankful that the well was partially covered and that I was able to keep Marion

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from sliding into it. "*Paul!*" she cried in horror, "oh, Paul!"

I hastened to follow her lead. "Paul," I said, with fierce sternness, "what do you mean, sir?"

"I mean," he replied accusingly, "that it's all spoiled. They've taken fright at your squabbling and put out their lamps."

Again we stared at each other in questioning silence. What had taken fright we knew not, but we did know that we had squabbled.

"Where did you hear that dreadful word?" demanded Marion.

"Darn?" queried Paul, with innocent pride. "I heard William Wedder say something when the coal-oil barrel rolled on his foot, and when I asked him 'I beg your pardon?' he couldn't remember what he had said, then when I kept on asking him to try to remember he said it must have been an exclamation called *darn*. I think it's ever so much nicer than *bother* or *good gracious*."

"It's a vulgar word, and only vulgar people use it," I commented reprovably.

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"Why, father, William said that when Joe Wrigley's horse stood up on his hind legs you said——"

"Paul," I interrupted hurriedly, "you said something took fright, and——"

"Hush!" said he, in a mysterious whisper, coming close to me. "It was the fairies. William said if we made an oil well and didn't say anything about it, they'd be sure to come to fill their lamps, and they have. I saw three of them climbing up my rope ladder when you frightened them off."

"Then you knew that William made this?" I exclaimed.

"Of course. I helped him to bury the barrel so that the fairies wouldn't know it wasn't a real natural well. He said if we kept it a secret it would be a pleasant surprise to you when I showed you the fairies. Hush! They're climbing up the rope ladder again. Peep down through that crack and you'll see them—very—ve—ry—quietly. There now—stand back. I'm going to help them up over the edge."

The next morning Peter Waydean came over to see me, his face wreathed in smiles,

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his manner most cordial. "Mr. Carton," he said genially, "I ain't on the hunt for oil wells this morning, but I was on my way to thank you for the trouble you took in rigging up that one when I met your little boy coming over to see me."

"Paul!" I exclaimed—"to see you?"

Peter nodded. "Great head on that little chap," he said. "'I don't want you to be angry at father about the oil well,' he says to me, 'for William and I made it together, and father didn't know anything about it,' says he, standing up straight and stiff. Then he told me the whole business, and although it turned out a good thing for me, I'm glad to know it was that scoundrel Wedder that tried to play it off, and not you. Paul was so tickled at me pretending to believe he really seen fairies that when he wanted me to say that I'd sell the farm to you just the same, I hadn't the heart to tell him it was sold."

"Sold?"

"Yes,—you see, I thought you had played that trick on me and I was so mad yesterday that when along comes another

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agent twice as keen to buy as them other two I jumped at the chance of selling. 'Name your price,' says he, 'to sell on the spot.' 'Six thousand,' says I, at a bluff. 'Done,' says he; and in five minutes the agreement was signed."

"Well," I said, with a sigh, "I suppose we'll have to move."

"Oh, I don't know," said Peter encouragingly. "Perhaps the party don't want to live here; though, considering the price," he added, with a shrewd smile, "he didn't buy just for speculation. They say he's got a fine place in the city and heaps of money, and he's just got married again to a widow. I might as well have asked another thousand, I believe."

"What is his name?" I asked, with sudden interest.

"Fairman. He owns—what—Mr. Carton, what's the——"

I relaxed my tense grip of his arm. "His first name?" I demanded eagerly.

"Joseph, I think. What's the matter?"

I am afraid my explanation was not very clear to Peter. I could not tell him the

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cause of my excitement, nor mention the fact that I had saved Mr. Fairman's life several times in one day, for that would have savored of boastfulness; so I hinted that when we were boys together Mr. Fairman had saved my life and had ever since regarded me with the highest esteem. Thus I preserved the main fact of our connection, only disguising it enough to let Marion see incidentally afterwards how careful I was to avoid the appearance of vainglory.

Now when I rushed into the house to tell Marion that Mr. Fairman had bought Waydean, I did so with the innocent exuberance of expectant delight with which children, not too sophisticated, view brown paper parcels that are delivered at their homes during the Christmas season. Marion's first thought, I could swear, was similar to mine; I could not mistake the vivid flash of happy gratitude that illumined her face, nor the sudden exclamation that was checked at the parting of her lips, yet her tone, when she did speak, expressed the utmost mystification. "Why,—how strange!" said she.

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For an instant I did not comprehend her mental attitude, but I am remarkably adaptable, not by nature, but by training, and by a swift turn I avoided plunging headlong into an awkward situation. It would show a want of delicacy, a sordid mind, a vulgar expectancy, were I not to ignore the thought that we had both almost uttered. Even though I saw an equine nose, a flowing tail and four legs protruding through the brown paper, I must not guess it was a rocking horse; above all, I must not hope it was to be mine.

"Yes," I remarked, with innocent bewilderment, "it is very strange. I wonder why he bought it."

Truly I have learned a thing or two. My wife regarded me with admiration that she scarcely tried to hide. I had saved Mr. Fairman's life without adding a cubit to my stature in her estimation, but by this trifling observance of the proprieties, this delicate expression of native refinement, I stood exalted upon a pedestal.

"I wonder," repeated Marion, after me, in deep conjecture, "why he—bought—it?"

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Our eyes met. In hers I could see a far-away amused sparkle; in my own I permitted a faint twinkle, then we both looked in another direction.

"Perhaps," I ventured cautiously, "Aunt Sophy will write and tell us."

"Perhaps she will," said Marion.

The reward of unconscious virtue arrived by the next mail, in the guise of a long letter from Mrs. Fairman.

".....I can scarcely realize that it is only three days since we said good-by," she wrote, "it seems so long ago. Of course we have been travelling most of the time and this is really the first chance I have had to write and tell you about the trip, and how constantly I think of your kindness to me, and what good reason I have to be grateful for the advice that had so much to do with my present happiness. Indeed, I confessed to Joseph how I was influenced by Henry's opinion, and he was quite affected. He keeps saying to me: 'A fine young man—a noble young man!' He describes to me over and over again how

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admirably Henry acted in the presence of danger the morning of our wedding; he says he hasn't a doubt but that for Henry's coolness and resource we wouldn't be married now. The thought makes me shudder! I suppose that is why I feel so nervous about him when he is out of sight; I am so afraid of another accident.

"But really, Marion, he hasn't been away from me for more than half an hour at a time, he is so devoted. Of course, with such large interests he has business to look after, but he does it altogether by telegrams. It amazes me to see the number he sends off, and I'm getting quite used to the shoals that arrive, but at first the sight of them made me feel quite ill. He never looks to see if there are more than ten words, and yesterday's hotel bill had an item of \$7.62 for telegrams!

"Somehow I have been thinking a great deal of your poor Uncle Philip lately. I think it must be the resemblance I see in Henry to him that has brought him so vividly before me—and I have come to the conclusion that I was too hard on him about

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the farming. Of course he spent a great deal of money on it, but the spending gave him pleasure, and if he had taken to horse-racing or gambling, or something worse, as so many men do, I would have had real cause to complain. I am older now, and I see that married men when they get to a certain age are inclined to fret and chafe, and perhaps bolt, if they are tethered with too short a rope. I see, too, that I didn't do Philip any good by trying to keep him from farming. Now, dear Marion, I have something to write that will not offend you, I hope. I tried to say it last week, but I couldn't quite get my courage up, for you have a little bit of a temper, dear, and I knew that if I saw your eyes flash I would get flustered and make a bungle of it. You know I always supposed it was Henry's own determination that kept him from buying any implements but a spade, a rake and a hoe, but from something Paul said I have surmised that it was because you made him promise not to. Perhaps, at the time, that was a wise precaution, but you are differently situated now, and you should modify

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your views. Of course Henry will do exactly as you say, and never let you see what it costs him, and although I admire his common sense about saving money, I admire him much more for his unselfish, uncomplaining devotion to your ideas. I believe if he thought it would give you any pleasure he would go and cut off his little finger on the chopping block in the woodshed. But I would advise you strongly, Marion (since you need have no fear for the future), to let him spend all the money he wishes on the farm, and to keep all sorts of fancy stock. Let him go ahead for a year at least and take all the pleasure he can out of it, and you'll find it will pay in the end. There's just one thing I would shut down on, if I were you (though I don't think it's likely he'd want to do it, but you never can tell how far they may go if they once get started), that is, underdraining. I don't know anything about overdrains, but I do know that underdrains are simply ruinous, and if you keep Henry from underdraining I don't believe he can waste much money. Now, dear Marion, write soon and let your

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poor old aunt know that you are not offended by this suggestion."

Marion stopped reading, covered her face with her hands and laughed hysterically, exclaiming, "Oh, how funny! You poor, —poor, down-trodden creature!"

I was dumb with astonishment at first,—there was much food for reflection in the letter,—but what surprised me most was the absence of any allusion to Mr. Fairman's buying the farm. "Is that all?" I asked, with breathless incredulity.

It wasn't. Marion found another sheet marked, "Later."

"Joseph came in a few minutes ago and handed me one of those telegrams to read. Imagine my astonishment at finding he has bought Waydean for Henry! It seems that on our wedding-day he made up his mind to do this, and never said a word to me about it. If he had I certainly would have said he was too late. How fortunate, after all, that your bargain with Peter fell through. I think Joseph is more pleased to be able to make Henry a present of Way-

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dean than about anything that has happened since we saw you last, and I can't tell you how glad I am. You see, Marion, Henry can go ahead with perfect confidence."

XIV

A PASTORAL CALL

FOR nearly two years I had rigidly adhered to Marion's scheme of inexpensive farming, with the result that we refrained from spending money at a rate that should have enabled us to amass a fortune in course of time. The rent which I paid to Peter practically included a bonus to him for working his own land, but this was a mere trifle to the outlay that would have been necessary had I essayed the rôle of an ordinary amateur farmer. Thus, from the standpoint of economy I can cheerfully testify that the plan was a success, but at times its chafing restrictions irritated me almost to the point of rebellion, as when I heard Abner Davis insinuate that I was not a regular farmer. This feeling, however, gradually wore away, as I learned that Marion's plan not only meant a pecuniary

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saving, but also a freedom from many responsibilities and worries inseparable from the lot of the ordinary farmer. At all times I could rise superior to the devastations of potato-bugs and cut-worms, early and late frosts, hog-cholera, hail-storms, floods, droughts, and mortgage interest. It was this consideration that made me hesitate to adopt Aunt Sophy's suggestion that I should indulge myself by launching forth in the fatuous career of the irregular farmer who spends his fortune in the delightful pursuit of a phantom profit, but when I began to fully realize that we owned Way-dean and that I had five thousand dollars in the bank, the prospect of farming on a larger scale became distinctly alluring. At this point I suddenly made the astounding discovery that Marion had entered upon a policy of absolute non-interference in the matter. Not only did she neglect to point out the proper course for me to take, but she also declined to express an opinion or make a comment upon anything even remotely connected with farming operations; nor would she explain her reasons for this

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extraordinary behavior, or admit that she had reasons. I could only guess that it was Aunt Sophy's letter which had influenced her to this complete inaction and apparent indifference to my agricultural operations.

It was then that I became aware how dependent I was upon my wife's judgment and how much I distrusted my own. Like a caged bird unwittingly made free, I felt bewildered and forsaken and vainly tried to be restored to favor. I am amenable to reason, to flattery, or to anything else that helps to make life pleasant and more worth living; not so with Marion. It is hopeless to attempt to change her purpose by external influences, and I soon gave up the thankless task of trying to extract an opinion from her that she was bound to keep to herself. It was while I was still in a state of mental bewilderment over her behavior that Peter Waydean came forward with what appeared to be a most reasonable proposition. While I had been puzzling over what I should do with the farm, it appeared that he, by a curious coincidence, was in a similar state of indecision about

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what he should do without it. He hadn't realized, he said, when he sold the place to Mr. Fairman, how attached he was to the old homestead or how bereft of occupation he would feel when he no longer cultivated the land that he had cropped for half a century. He could scarcely make me understand how gratified he was that I, and not a stranger, was now the owner; indeed, the idea had occurred to him that, considering our friendly relations as neighbors, we might make an arrangement, to our mutual advantage—ahem!—to work the land on shares.

I had but a vague idea of what working land on shares meant, and I had to ask him to explain the term. Instead of giving me a precise definition, he began by pointing out that if I worked the farm myself I would have the expense of keeping a hired man all the year round, as well as extra hands in the busy season; I would have a continued outlay for farm-stock, implements, feed and sundries. On the other hand, if we worked the land on shares, he would be willing to do all the work himself and pro-

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vide everything necessary, if I were willing to pay him the three hundred dollars that it would cost me to keep a hired man.

"And the produce?" I asked warily, though I felt inclined to agree on the spot.

Peter rubbed his chin thoughtfully before he spoke. "I was going to say that we might share and share alike, but I'm ready to do more than that," with an expansive smile. "You see, as I told you once before, taking one year with another, farming don't pay, and you might have to share two years' losses against one year's profits." He paused for a moment, and I nodded knowingly. "Now," he continued, "I'll take the hull darned crop myself, and if it don't pay expenses you don't lose, but if there is any profit once in a while, I'll have something for horse and cow feed."

This offer sounded so generous that I almost succumbed; indeed, I would have agreed at once but for the caution inspired by my previous dealings with him, and the remembrance that Marion counted it one of my failings that my first impulse was always to agree with any plausible proposition.

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This thought gave me moral courage enough to withhold my consent until I had time to talk it over with my wife.

Now when I eagerly began to explain the advantages of working the land on shares I was so full of the subject that I forgot temporarily that Marion was leaving me to my own devices, nor did I remember till I paused for her opinion, and heard the interesting comment that I'd better get the whitewash mixed up so that we could do the kitchen right after dinner.

I mixed the whitewash with fierce energy. After dinner I applied it with a concentrated vigor that, properly distributed, would have whitened the White House. As I worked, I ruminated bitterly upon Marion's aggravating reserve, doubly annoying in that I had an instinct that she saw a fatal flaw in the plan which was not apparent to me. When I finished the walls and ceiling of the kitchen I found that I had incidentally whitened the stove, the floor and myself.

To my surprise, Marion made no comment on this as she prepared to scrub the floor, her features expressing calm content,

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with perhaps a suggestion of scornful amusement that was not definite enough to justify me in accusing her of implying that I hadn't done the work neatly. She had just dipped her scrubbing brush into the pail of water, and I was in the act of removing my bespattered overalls, when the front door-bell rang. It was such an unusual occurrence at Waydean for anyone to come to the front door that the sound of the bell at this juncture created a commotion. Neither of us was presentable, but Marion seized a towel and rubbed some splashes of lime off my face, hurried me into an old coat and declared I must go. I had learned previously that on any special occasion it is always the man who must go, so I did not protest. I even went willingly, for the bell rang a second time with a portentous reverberation that thrilled me with expectancy that something was about to happen, and I was in the mood to enjoy something happening. As I glanced at the mirror in the hall I was startled to see that my hair and beard were powdered a delicate gray with the lime, and that the lines in my face

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looked like the deep seams of old age, but as this couldn't be helped I opened the door with my usual air of inquiring dignity.

"How are you, Mr. Waydean?" demanded a hearty voice, and a large, bearded, black-clothed, silk-hatted man grasped my hand with a fervent pressure.

I am singularly open to sympathy, and at that particular time I would have welcomed the benediction of a wayside beggar, so I returned the hearty hand-clasp and replied that I was from fair to middling, warmly inviting him to walk into the parlor. It did not occur to me until he spread his coat tails and inverted his hat on the floor that he looked as if he might be an ex-clerical insurance or book agent, and I was rather more relieved than impressed when he announced that he was the new pastor of the only church in the neighborhood. I attempted to apologize for my disordered appearance and to explain that I was not a church-goer, also that Waydean was not my name, but that of the place.

"Not one word, Mr. Waydean," he interrupted, his deep voice drowning my

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courteous utterance. "You wouldn't think so, perhaps, but I was brought up on a farm, and I have learned that clothes do not make a man. Would you be a different person, let me ask, were you clothed in sheepskins or purple and fine linen?"

"I never tried either of those costumes," I answered, "but if you saw me in my ordinary clothes you wouldn't take me for a farmer."

"Come now, Mr. Waydean," he urged, tapping my knee insistently; "would you or would you not be the same man? A straight answer, if you please—no hedging."

"Well," I admitted, "I suppose I would be the same man, but I'd look mighty different."

He leaned back in his chair, contemplating me with a satisfied smile. "I am pleased to see that you are willing to grant that you are in error," he said, stroking his beard; "it's always better to tell the truth at first than to wait until you are obliged to do so. But this, of course, is not what I called to say, and I must come to the point.

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I've preached in this church two Sabbaths, and you have not been present. May I ask you why?"

"Well I—I'm not much in the habit of going to church. I——"

"Hedging again, Mr. Waydean," he said, holding up a warning forefinger. "I must insist upon your being perfectly frank. I have reason to suppose you have stayed away on account of this petty disagreement with Brother Bunce and Brother Lemon. Is not that the fact?"

Alas, I could not say! Had I known the particulars of the petty disagreement he mentioned I might have hazarded an admission that he was correct in his surmise, for I find it easier to acknowledge that a person is right in a matter of no interest to me than think up arguments on the other side. I felt like a small boy who is called upon to decide instantly whether his punishment will be mitigated or increased if he confesses to a deed of which he is both innocent and ignorant. I looked in every direction but at my accuser, and remained silent.

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“ Mr. Waydean,” he went on, with a note of sympathetic compassion that would have softened my heart had I been a sinner, “ I find it is better to begin work in a new sphere by smoothing out anything that has caused discord, so I have come to you to-day as a peacemaker to speak about your demeanor in church, which, I understand, has been the primary cause of this trouble.”

“ My demeanor in church ? ” I cried, with indignant incredulity.

“ Not a word, if you please, until I have stated the case in full, as I understand it; then I shall listen to your explanation. You are in the habit of sleeping in church, and——”

Again I struggled to disclaim the habit of church-going. Again his masterful voice drowned my protest.

“ I can assure you, Mr. Waydean, that we all have habits of which we are totally unconscious. I, for instance, invariably moisten my thumb in turning the leaves of the pulpit Bible, and I am inclined to disbelieve my wife when she mentions the matter afterwards. Now, I want you to

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take my word for it that you have the habit I am about to speak of, even though you may think you haven't."

I remembered with an effort that my name was Peter Waydean ; at the same time I was thrilled by a sudden conviction that, as resistance seemed useless, a delightful situation would result if I consented to play the part that was being thrust upon me so vigorously. There was no sound of scrubbing from the kitchen, and I was positive that Marion had left her work to listen to the conversation. This consideration gave zest to the idea, for things seemed to have been providentially arranged so that Marion might remain in the background, wrathfully powerless to interfere in what had every appearance of proving to be a most entertaining masquerade.

"Mr. Hughes, I'll try," I said meekly.

"Well then, I will say frankly that I think it excusable if you occasionally fall asleep during the sermon on a warm day, considering that you have but one day's rest in the week from most arduous manual labor ; but, it happens, your pew is between

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Brother Bunce's and Brother Lemon's, and they, too, are sometimes overcome by somnolency. Don't be offended if I put the matter plainly,—they both complain that you have the habit of going to sleep and——”

“ But what right have they to complain of my going to sleep, when they——”

“ There,—there!—be calm, and I'll explain. Remember, they are both liberal givers and pillars of the church, and we must do nothing to alienate them; indeed, if we can do anything to make them more comfortable it is our duty to do so. Now they do not complain of your going to sleep, but they protest against having their rest disturbed by—ahem!—your—your *snoring*.”

“ My *snoring*!” I exclaimed wrathfully. “ Let me inform you, sir, I never snore. I—” A choking guttural sound from the dining-room, followed by an artificial feminine cough, arrested my denial. I gulped twice, then I went on humbly: “ I should say, rather, that I was not aware I snored.”

“ Well put, Mr. Waydean,” said my men-

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tor approvingly. "I remember the first time my wife told me I snored I was quite irritated, so I know how you feel. But I have investigated this matter thoroughly before coming to you, and I find the opinion is universal that you are in fault."

"Well, then, what are you going to do about it? If I'm not wanted in the church I'm willing to stay away."

"No, no,—my dear sir, I will not hear of such a thing. I am determined that no one shall leave the church during my pastorate. I would suggest, however, that you might change your pew to one at the rear of the building under the gallery. You would be more comfortable there, and Bunce and Lemon would be out of range, so to speak."

"Never," I protested firmly. "I shall either keep my pew at the front, or leave the church."

"You will listen to reason, Mr. Way-dean," he insisted, with confident decision. "I was told that you were obstinate, and that I might as well leave you alone, but I want you to set a good example to your

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neighbors and show them you are a man of sense. May I—ah—ask you to call in Mrs. Waydean, if she is at home?"

It was a move that took me unawares; I almost broke out into a cold sweat. There was a sudden dull thump in the dining-room that sounded as if the cat had jumped down from the top of the dresser to the floor, and I knew that Marion in her dismay had dropped into a chair. Somehow this sound was inspiriting. She could not get upstairs without being seen by our visitor, and in her old skirt she was as impotent to interrupt any statement I chose to make as if she were bound and gagged. Therefore, with inward relish and outward regret, I answered that my wife had been so unfortunate as to twist her ankle and had been confined to her bed for two days.

He only paused to express the proper condolences before returning to the point; leaning forward confidentially, he lowered his voice. "The fact is, Mr. Waydean, I sympathize with your stand in the matter, but we must all make sacrifices for the good of the community. You must consider that

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these men give liberally, and how, may I ask, could the revenue be made up if they left the church?"

More was implied by the diplomatic suggestiveness of his tone than by the words. There was a pause, during which I pursed up my lips, half-closed my eyes, and thoughtfully rubbed the bristles on my chin. "Well," I remarked at length, in a reflective tone, "I suppose you think I might do a little better?"

"To be quite frank, I think you might," he responded. "It is a delicate matter to mention, but you have the reputation of being the wealthiest man in the neighborhood, and—and——"

"And the closest," I added, with a touch of asperity. "To be quite frank with *you*, Mr. Hughes, I didn't take much stock in your predecessor, or I might have given more; but now I may perhaps feel differently. You make Bunce and Lemon attend to their own beams, and I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll——" Again that falsetto cough from the next room checked my flow of speech. I had completely forgotten

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Marion, having become so absorbed in my part.

“ Well? ” he asked expectantly.

I glanced around nervously and lowered my voice almost to a whisper. “ I’ll give as much cash as I gave before; besides, I’ll give half my crop.”

“ Half your crop! ” he exclaimed in amazement.

“ Half—my—crop,” I solemnly asserted; “ if you care to send for it. Perhaps you could get Bunce and Lemon to team the produce to market? ”

“ I’ll attend to that,” he responded cheerfully. “ I’ll get up a bee, and lend a hand myself. I hope,—ho, ho, ho!—that you will have a large crop. What do you propose to grow next year? ”

“ Well, I—I haven’t quite decided.”

“ Considering that I have a half-interest, let me suggest potatoes.”

“ Potatoes! ” I exclaimed. “ Why, they’re not worth digging this year—fifteen cents a bag! ”

The minister laughed. “ Ninety-nine farmers out of a hundred will reason in the

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same way," he said ; " then the crop will be short and the prices high. Be the hundredth man, and plant potatoes."

I thanked him for the advice, which seemed to me to be excellent. He rose to go, then placed his hand affectionately on my shoulder. " Keep your pew," he said, " and leave me to settle with Brothers Bunce and Lemon ; but if, as a favor to me, you could keep from—*going to sleep?*——"

I could not resist the urgent friendliness of his appeal. " Mr. Hughes," I responded, " I can promise never to close my eyes while listening to your sermons ; more than that, I'll see that Bunce and Lemon keep awake also."

His eyes twinkled with appreciative humor as he thanked me, and a sudden remorse seized me for taking advantage of his insistent belief that I was Peter Waydean. I might have yielded to my inclination to confess, had not Marion's cough given place to a series of energetic movements which I interpreted as a threat that she was preparing to enter the room to expose my duplicity. As a usual thing I am

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easily intimidated, but sometimes when I get beyond my depth I become bold, defiant, reckless. I had, after all, done no wrong; I had merely accepted a situation that had been forced upon me. My wife, on the contrary, had behaved with heartless indifference. After training me to depend upon her judgment, after teaching me to obey the dictates of her conscience, she had, without a word of warning, sympathy or apology, left me to wrestle alone with a momentous question; left me to be tossed about like a tailless kite or a rudderless boat. Well, it was my plain duty to teach her a lesson, and I saw the way to point a pretty moral and at the same time settle my doubts as to the wisdom of allowing Peter to work my land on shares. Marion had refused her opinion on this matter; she might now listen while I appealed to a stranger.

"Mr. Hughes," I said hurriedly, as he picked up his hat, "sit down for five minutes more—I want to ask your advice."

He did so, and briefly,—very briefly, for the sounds indicated that Marion was desperately sponging her skirt on the dining-

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room table,—I sketched a proposition similar to Peter's. "Now," I concluded, "do you consider that a fair arrangement for the city man as well as for the farmer?"

"A fair arrangement!" he exclaimed. "Where is the city man's share?"

"Wouldn't it be in the money he wouldn't spend by not working the land himself?" I asked earnestly.

He laughed in joyous abandonment. "Really, Mr. Waydean," he gasped, "you have an extraordinary mind. But it doesn't pay to juggle with one's conscience, even in the case of a city man—it would be downright extortion."

Again I was moved by his geniality to confess that I was not the man I seemed; again was this virtuous resolve crushed. Before I could speak, he went on: "You wouldn't have asked me this if your conscience hadn't troubled you. Three hundred dollars bonus for the farmer—and *all* the produce!" Again his smile broke out afresh as he looked at me in mild reproof. "Oh, I know what you're thinking. I, too, thought at one time that amateur farmers

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were designed by Providence to add to the prosperity and entertainment of legitimate cultivators of the soil, but—oh, dear me!—three hun—ho, ho, ho!— Why, you'd kill your goose."

"Goose!" I cried fiercely. "Do you mean to call me a goose?"

"No, no,—I was going to say you'd kill your goose——"

"*Don't* say it, then," I adjured him, with bitter resentment. "If you mention anything oval and metallic and glittering, I'll have a—a nervous prostration. Why do men of your profession want to wreck the nerves of your listeners by firing off the most obvious remarks, the stalest platitudes, the most hackneyed metaphors? Why can't you sometimes say something unexpected? I'd go to church if I could listen to sermons in which I didn't always know what was coming next."

It was his turn to wince. An angry flush mounted to his cheeks, and he positively glowered at me. "Permit me to say," he thundered, extending his right arm in a pulpit gesture, "that I wasn't going to

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mention the gol"—I don't know what he wasn't going to mention, for I clapped my hands over my ears just in time to escape hearing, because I felt that I really couldn't bear a certain reference that he seemed bent upon making. The next words that reached me were: "—was about to say that if you pluck all the feathers off your goose out of season the result will be fatal. Mr. Waydean, you are behaving in——"

"Don't," I implored—"don't Mr. Waydean me again. I'm *not* old Waydean. I'm——"

"You're not—Peter Waydean?" he gasped.

"No,—I'm not."

"I—I was told this was the Waydean homestead."

"It is," I said, regaining my composure, "but he doesn't live here."

He stared at me blankly. "And you?"

"Oh, I'm only the city man."

He picked up his hat and moved toward the door. "Good-afternoon," he said frigidly.

Remorse for what was past and despair

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for what was to come gripped me. "I'm sorry for the mistake," I said, following him to the door, "but you wouldn't give me a chance to explain."

Without a word or look in reply, he walked away, selfishly absorbed in his own thoughts.

XV

THE HARVEST

I SUPPOSE the law of retributive punishment is, strictly speaking, a just one, but I feel sure there is such a thing as carrying it too far, especially when it is applied without regard to the mitigating circumstances that sometimes prompt a usually tractable man to kick over the traces. I think, in a case of this kind, a deeper moral effect may be obtained by the application of the beautiful theory that crime, like virtue, has its own inevitable reward, apart from any extraneous punishment that the human intellect can devise. Years before, when the latter philosophy was expounded to me by Marion during a discussion on the subject, it seemed a mere abstract proposition that verged on absurdity, but in the painful moments that elapsed between the departure of the minister and my hesitating entrance to

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the dining-room its true significance burst upon me like a ray of sunshine. I would remind Marion of her convictions; I would tell her I had adopted her view; she would refrain, in deference to her own unswerving opinions, to add to the mental anguish that had already led me to see how unwise it was to give way to evil impulses.

Therefore, encouraged by this thought, I faced my wife as if nothing had happened since I left the kitchen to answer the summons of the door-bell. I was prepared to find her indignant, wrathful, in tears, but I did not expect to see her sitting in an attitude of apathetic despair, dry-eyed and speechless.

"Good heavens, Marion!" I cried. "What's the matter?"

It was some time before I could get her to answer; then it was a positive relief to see her lips move and hear her say faintly, "You've—done it—now."

I had difficulty in finding out what I had done. A gleam of hope thrilled me when at last she revived enough to attack in the open.

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Then, and not till then, did I develop my strategic lines of defence. First, I pleaded justification; second, that my vivid imagination, like Paul's, had led me to believe for the time that I was Peter; third, that I had tried in vain to make the minister understand that I was not Peter; fourth, that my desire for sympathy and companionship had warped my judgment and caused me to innocently yield to temptation; fifth, that I could not see that I had done wrong; sixth, that the burden of poignant grief for my conduct was more than I could bear; seventh, that any attempt to rub it in would harden my heart and stifle the reproaches of my own conscience; eighth,—well, to the final argument upon which I based my futile hopes Marion replied that her own attitude, born of the humiliating discovery of the kind of man I really was, might well be considered part of the inevitable consequences of my misdeeds, and that if she had ever given me cause to believe that she thought differently she took it all back.

It was then, with my guns spiked, that I surrendered unconditionally. I only pleaded

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that for Paul's sake—dear little Paul, who, in his plays, so innocently invented fictions that rivalled Munchausen's—we should gather up the little fragments of our shattered happiness and piece them together with calm resignation. I was about to suggest that we should seek consolation in a life of self-abnegation by trying to do good to others, but, seeing that Marion was obviously moved, I desisted. I am proud to say I know how far to go; I am prouder that I know when to stop and keep a good thing for another occasion.

Marion was melted, and no regular farmer was ever more grateful to see the welcome rain after a scorching drought than I was to see her tears. She was melted, and yet, strange to say, I could not get her to assure me that I was forgiven, and I am so constituted that I cannot be content without warm assurances to that effect.

Months went by, and we regained our happiness to an amazing extent; indeed, if Marion had not still refused to confirm it, I would have supposed that I was completely forgiven, for she sometimes went so far

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as to smile in recalling my conversation with the minister. I no longer worried over her refusal to express an opinion about the farm, for I had made up my mind to have nothing to do with Peter, and to grow potatoes, and potatoes, and yet more potatoes. I had a strong instinct that potatoes would be trumps. Seed was cheap, though labor came high. Joe Wrigley was the only available man, and though he had previously been eager to work for me at a dollar and a half a day, his terms went up to two dollars when I tried to hire him for the season. I thought his wholesale price should be lower than the retail one, but I had to agree to his terms. Day after day he ploughed and harrowed and planted, until I called a halt on the first of July with about one-third of the farm in potatoes. Throughout the summer I bore the jocular allusions of my experienced neighbors to the potato farm, replying only with a shrewd and complacent smile; later, I was flattered to notice that knowing glances of amusement were conspicuously absent when I entered the post-office at mail time, and that my casual remarks were

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treated with grave consideration. Later still, when the price went up to a dollar and a half a bag, and the prospect that I would have a large crop became a certainty, I was able to indulge in exultant calculations of my probable profits. These delightful anticipations were slightly marred by Marion's persistent lack of enthusiasm, and the fact that when I asked her if she could ever forgive me she always replied that she hoped to be able to before winter. There was something so pointed and yet elusive in this remark that I could not fathom her meaning, and it was not until I noticed that whenever I mentioned potatoes a peculiar tight expression appeared about her mouth that I could guess she was reserving her forgiveness until my promise was redeemed.

One day in the beginning of October I wrote a brief note to the minister. Now I had never seriously considered the possibility of ignoring the promise I had made during my lapse of identity, but I will confess that it was with a pang I prepared to redeem it, for I loved every one of those conical heaps that dotted my fields, with a

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passionate first love that I knew I could never feel again. Indeed, if I could have preserved them from decay, I would rather have left the pyramids where they stood, as a lasting monument to the genius of the city man who raised more than two thousand dollars worth of potatoes at a cost of less than one thousand, but with iron resolution I determined to keep to the letter of my promise. Of course, I might have done so in a private and incidental manner, but I frankly admit that I believe if a man chooses to be noble and generous he ought to be so in a manner that gives him the most enjoyment and furnishes the most telling example to others.

On the morning of the twenty-first of October the Fairmans arrived to spend with us the first anniversary of their wedding, and not a small part of the pleasure of seeing them again was, to me, the delighted admiration they expressed on making a tour of the pyramids. Aunt Sophy was so exuberant over my success, and her husband so frankly astonished when he rapidly cal-

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culated the value of the crop in dollars and cents, that I had much difficulty in retaining my usual modest and unassuming manner. Even Marion, despite a certain inflexible set to her mouth that I detected under her company expression, couldn't help looking regretfully pleased.

We had a most enjoyable dinner, sitting so long over the table that Paul excused himself and went out to play, but it was only a short time until he came running back with the petrifying news that there was a funeral entering the gate. There was a simultaneous rush to the front windows, and out on the road we all saw a long line of democrats beginning to move slowly through our gate. Between the trees, at the head of the procession, we caught fleeting glimpses of a professional silk hat and a suit of black clothes.

"Henry!" cried Marion, with a little shriek. "You wouldn't — let them — bury ——?"

"Well, I don't know. If it's a Waydean — and the custom——"

"*Henry!*" shrieked Aunt Sophy, clasping Marion in her arms.

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"Really," began Mr. Fairman, "I—I—"

"They've stopped in the yard," yelled Paul, putting his head in the doorway.

I headed the rush to the back window, then one more rush brought us all into the yard, Mr. Fairman in the rear, supporting the ladies, while Paul, who revels in sudden excitement, skipped about us in glee. The driver of the first wagon was Peter Waydean; the professional person descending with his back to us was the Rev. Daniel Hughes. He came forward with a genial smile and greeted me warmly.

"Mr. Carton," he said, "we have come to take advantage of——"

My arm was gripped from behind. "Pay him to take it away—*at once*," whispered Aunt Sophy in my ear, with fierce energy, pressing her purse into my hand.

There was a sudden silence; the dramatic moment had arrived. I stepped back and courteously introduced Mr. Hughes to Aunt Sophy, to Marion, to Mr. Fairman. In a few simple and carefully chosen words I explained that Mr. Hughes and my neighbors had come at my request to take one-

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half of my crop for the benefit of the church. Then the minister made a most handsome acknowledgment, and I tried to look deprecating. There was rapt attention on the part of the listeners, the men on the wagons being visibly impressed, those at the rear craning their necks to get a better view of the tableau. Aunt Sophy beamed gratification; her husband sighed regretfully, as if he thought the contribution rather large. And in Marion's eyes I read the most charming and complete forgiveness that could fall to the lot of an erring husband; indeed, they were brimming with such perfect trust and confidence in my innate nobility of character that I instantly resolved to become even more worthy of her esteem.

We watched the long line of wagons pass through the barnyard and round the end of the barn on the way to the back fields, and as I stood slightly in advance of the others I heard Mr. Fairman wonder in a low tone if I proposed to run for the legislature.

"Just like a thing your Uncle Philip would have done!" murmured Aunt Sophy to Marion.

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A fleeting spasm crossed Mr. Fairman's face, then his calm serenity returned. I fancy that Uncle Philip had better be dropped, or Aunt Sophy's husband's admiration for me may lapse.

On the last wagon rode Abner Davis. He returned my salute with respectful solemnity, and I could scarcely repress a smile of triumph as I recalled his derisive remark that I was not a regular farmer. Paul, some latent boyish instinct stirring within him, ran after the wagon and clung to the tail-board, an unheard of feat for him.

"I wonder what kind of a farmer Abner Davis will call you now," said Marion, voicing my complacent pride.

At that moment loud guffaws, Abner's unmistakable laugh and his companion's, reached us from the wagon that had rounded the barn, and Paul came dashing back, breathless.

"Father," he called out, gleefully, "I heard him say that any man who would give half of such a fine crop to——"

"To what?" I asked, with eager interest as Paul stopped for breath.

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“—to—the church—when——”

“Oh, hurry, Paul!” cried his mother.

“—potatoes were such a price—was
——”

We waited in suspense, various flattering allusions to my generous gift suggesting themselves as that mischievous boy stopped to spin around on his heels and laugh in elfish glee.

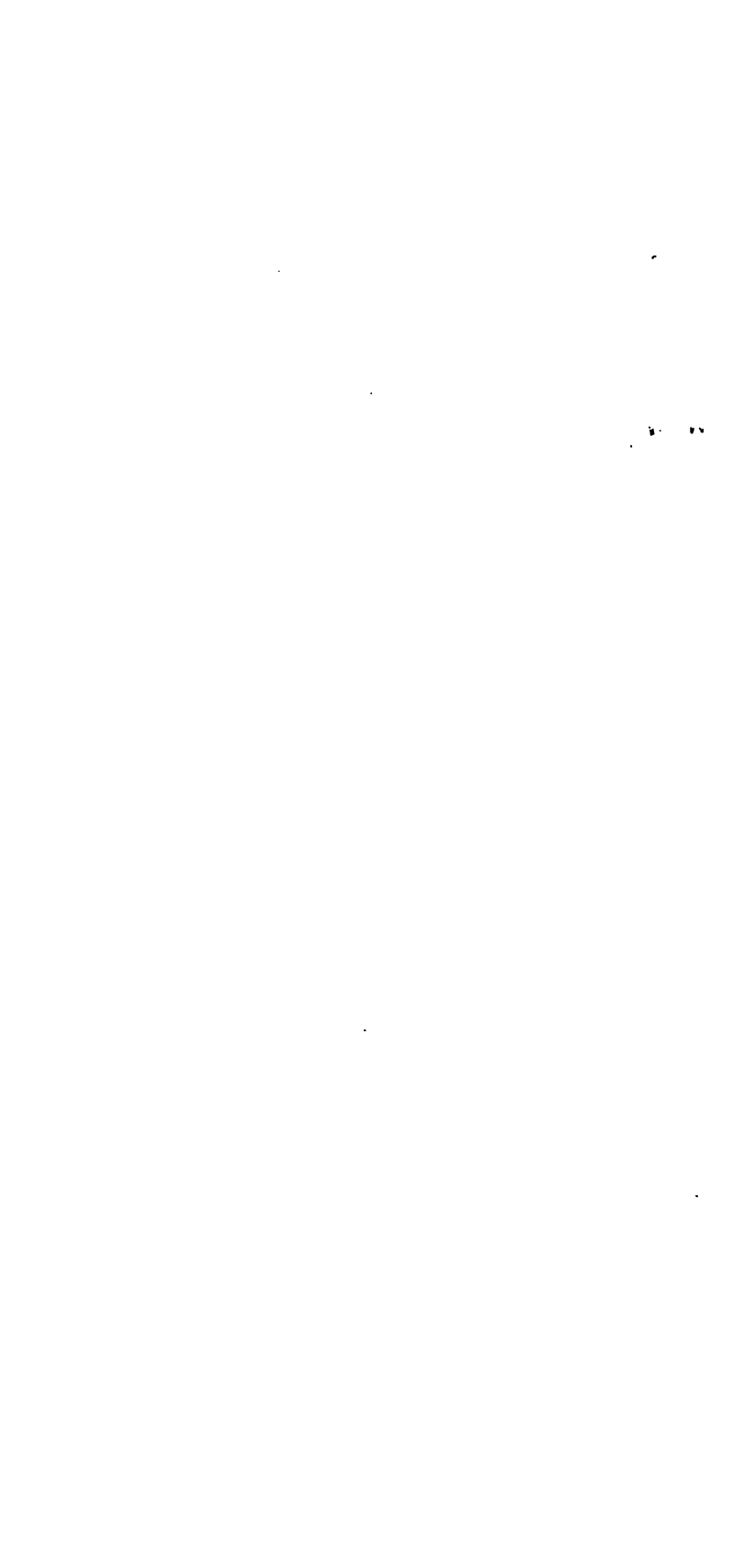
“Was *what*?” we cried in chorus.

“—A da-r-r-n fool!” shrieked Paul.

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